THE NEXT REGULAR MEETING OF
THE CLUB
10 NOVEMBER 2014
WILL BE HELD AT
VILLA TAVERNA
720 MONTGOMERY STREET
SAN FRANCISCO
1800H
PAPER: SAM HAMM

RSVP PEB@BFARM.COM
415.421.4800

THE NEXT MEETING *of*
the club
WILL BE HELD
APRIL 13, 2015

THE FRENCH CLUB
414 MASON STREET #801
SAN FRANCISCO

6:00*pm* COCKTAILS
7:00*pm* DINNER
8:30*pm* PAPER *by* JAMIE SHERMAN

RSVP *to* HOST TOM FERGUSON
{with choice of entrée}
thomasff@mindspring.com

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The next meeting of

THE CLUB

will be held

February 9, 2015

Paper by

JAMES BENNINGTON

200 Laurel Street
6pm Cocktails
7pm Dinner

Please RSVP to Host
Wesley Moore
wezmo@aol.com (415) 606-4465

Le Menu

ASPARAGUS SOUP

HERB CRUSTED CHILEAN SEA BASS
endive confit, champagne beurre blanc

LAMB RACK & SHOULDER CONFIT
sauce béarnaise

OR

AHI TUNA PROVENÇAL
eggplant parmesan

FROMAGE DE FRANCE

BLUEBERRY TART

CHEF: *Lionel Balbastre*
GÉRANT/SOMMELIER: *Marcus Garcia*

CRANE & CO.

Meeting of... the club

Monday, **January 12th, 2015**

Cocktails at 6PM
Dinner at 7PM
Paper (by Member Hobson) at 8PM

Hosted by Member Pettus

34 Grove Street
San Rafael, CA 94901
PH: 415/533-7060

RSVP: dwpettus@gmail.com

DISEASE AND HISTORY

The Club

By Barrett Weber

History, as defined by Webster is a story or tale. Notice that Webster doesn't say it has to be true. The second definition states that history is a collection of facts that explain a certain event. Let us just say, we are looking at history through a special keyhole.

Our subject and hero tonight is disease, disease and its relationship to history. Historians and/or literary people don't mind saying, "science says this, or science says that". As a scientist I will discuss history just as glibly. The history you hear may be controversial, but the diseases were real.

Our hero, disease, conquered great kings and generals, altered forever great religions and subdued large continents. Yet, little is written or known about our hero. Man through the ages has treated illness as revenge of the gods. The gods didn't put a curse on Achilles heel, it was just that the armor of the day didn't cover that area of anatomy. Some historians have touched on the influence that disease has had, but the history books don't place disease in a dominant role and they are wrong.

The Eurasians domesticated wild animals for food, labor, and transportation, whereas the Amerindian's only domesticated animal was the dog. Living in close contact with animals caused problems. Many diseases have an animal host or carry bacteria, parasites or viruses similar to those that cause human diseases. Cows carry tuberculosis and the poxvirus. Cat's distemper is similar to measles, and of course rats are carriers of the plague bacillus. The

Aborigines in Australia and the Amerindians, who were more separated from animals, led a healthier life.

THE GREEK ERA

We don't know much about the nature of disease in the ancient civilizations except that many diseases existed. Tuberculosis and small pox are documented. Gonorrhea and leprosy were mentioned in the Old Testament.

In Ancient Greece the doctor, Aesculapius, was elevated to the rank of a god. Many temples where the sick were taken were built to honor him. The results probably were dramatic and supernatural powers were ascribed to these places. The temples were isolated and airy. The climate was mild, fresh food and water abundant and clean. This is in contrast to the typical Greek home, with animals, overcrowding, and suspicious sewage disposal systems. No wonder many of the sick who sought help at the temples got better. Incidentally, a poem found on the wall of an Aesculapian temple bears quoting.

> **" A surgeon's skill our wound to heal,**
> **is worth more than armies to the public weal."**

Ancient Egyptian medicines and their doctors had a good reputation that carried into the middle ages. The Nile Valley was always an unhealthy place as evidenced by examination of the mummies. The doctors were priests, who, with the nobility lived in clean palaces, isolated from the dense populations. Obviously, the water supply and food was better in the palaces. This gave the nobility a great advantage over the slaves and peasants. Moses grew up in this elite environment and undoubtedly learned many of the very practical health rules of the palace, which he passed on to the Jewish people. Just before the Exodus, the Nile became

badly polluted. All the frogs died and there was a great increase in the number of insects leading to multiple plagues. There was death in every house in Egypt". During this confusion, somehow the Jews stayed healthy and escaped from Egypt. That the Jews could wander in the desert so long without succumbing was probably due to the genius of Moses with his very strict laws on hygiene, the handling of garbage, food laws, and the burial laws. There is some evidence in the Bible that the Jews dominance in their new land was due to the Palestinians lack of immunity. According to Hans Zinsser, it is difficult to think that the Jews who were "no lilies in their relations with others", had God entirely on their side.

The Ancients lived along the great rivers, the Nile in Egypt, the Tigris and Euphrates in Mesopotamia, the Indus and Ganges in India, and the Yellow River in China. These civilizations had in common high plateaus descending into rather arid plains. They depended on irrigation that required well-organized, usually despotic governments. The disease gradient into the warmer and wetter climates was too great for mass migrations. Southern China, mid Africa, and Southern India were sparsely populated. From the beginning of recorded history about 2000 BC to 500 BC, the ancients more or less came into balance with diseases in their particular areas (they most likely developed immunities).

Socrates had a very large library of ancient medical treatises. They were all lost except for the collection from Hippocrates. This remarkable group of case histories and advice dating around 450 BC was very accurate in its descriptions of disease, and very practical in its modes of treatment. Therefore, the Greek doctors and Greek medicine were esteemed throughout the known world. Rome thought so highly of Greek doctors that they were given automatic Roman citizenship and excused from paying taxes. Hippocratic books were considered the

basis for good medicine that lasted until the l7th century AD. There is evidence Hippocrates prescribed opium and wine for pain. We find no record of epidemics in the armies up to the 4th century BC.

Before Hippocrates, doctors assumed no responsibility; the gods determined the success or failure of their treatment. In other words, rest, diet and faith constituted treatment. Hippocrates for the first time separated medicine from religion. He attempted to establish medicine as a science. Man could discover the laws of nature by observation and unbiased reasoning, quite a difference from the faith healers. Hippocrates differentiated diseases. Up to that time there was just one abnormal condition and no note was given to different diseases.

During this period, Athens became the intellectual and artistic jewel of the ancient world. A successful army along with a powerful fleet made them a dominant country. By 404 BC the Athenian Empire had collapsed. Looking through our keyhole we find a very compelling reason for this sudden decline. According to Thucydides, in 430 BC an epidemic of huge proportions attacked the Athenian army, the fleet, and then the home population. During the brief summer months up to 1/3 of the army and population died, along with Pericles. Within 30 years of this plague, Athens fell and the Peloponnesian Wars were over.

This was the first time a competent historian (Thucydides) described an epidemic in detail. The disease itself remains a mystery. The New England Medical Journal has published several papers trying to determine its cause. There was fever, severe gastrointestinal symptoms, blisters, open sores, and death. The dogs and vultures that fed on the unburied bodies also died. This was unique. Let's call it a variant of small pox. How do societies react to an epidemic of this magnitude? We know that the Athenian army and fleet were withdrawn

suddenly from Peloponesia after sustaining a death rate of 33%. The returning survivors infected the remaining population and death was so widespread that the dead could not be buried. The collection of taxes, transportation, food supply, all were seriously impaired. There was panic and a complete breakdown of society. The subjective impact on these highly sophisticated people must have been great when one out of three died. This marvelous society was over ridden within twenty years. Around 300 BC the Macedonians and Roman armies conquered Greece.

The Story of Greece contains two outstanding men, Aristotle and his pupil, Alexander the Great. According to Darwin, Aristotle was the world's greatest natural biologist. He was the first to look on humans as part of the animal world, and should be studied accordingly. Alexander conquered much of the known world. He sent back to Aristotle large numbers of herbs and plants. He fused Persian, Babylonian, Egyptian pharmacology into the armamentarium of the Greek schools. This had far reaching and long lasting effects throughout Europe and the Middle East. Along the way, Alexander founded great centers of learning which were the think tanks of their day. The best known of these was in Alexandria, Egypt, an amazing collection of talent, libraries, and inventions. Alexander's army would not follow him into India and the valley of the Ganges, due to the prevalence of disease in the ranks of the army. Alexander was forced to retreat, and on the way back he died at the age of 33, possibly of malaria and alcoholism.

Despite the scientific approach of Aristotle and Hippocrates, they created a smoke screen around our friend, disease. The doctors of the day believed in spontaneous generation. In other words creatures sprang up out of the dung heap de novo. This logical approach may have

worked wonders for great theological problems, but kept medicine from advancing for almost 2000 years. They forgot to look carefully into the dung heap. If someone had, they might have seen that flies lay the eggs, and the maggots developed, not spontaneously, but from the eggs. The great doctors of the day were excellent in treating fractures, dislocations, and trauma. Despite their accurate description of medical disease, they had very little to offer in terms of treatment. This remained true until the l9th century.

THE ROMAN ERA

We now scan the Roman era that is truly remarkable in its longevity and impact. The population in Italy and surrounding countries was growing rapidly. Through our keyhole, we see not so much great generals, but engineering geniuses. Marvelous bridges and roads were built, allowing rapid transportation for food and armies. Houses were solid, eliminating the hiding places for rats. Before Christ, Rome had built an underground, separate, sewage system. This same system is in use today. Separation of the water and sewage systems decreased the risk of waterborne diseases such as typhoid and cholera. The Romans drained the swamps, getting rid of the insects and widespread malaria. The cities became larger and healthier. The Romans exported these wonders to conquered lands. Along with the fresh water came the baths, which helped to keep them clean. No wonder the Romans flourished and colonized the Mediterranean, European and Middle East lands. Medically, they relied heavily on Greek doctors who were treated as a precious commodity.

The most influential doctor was Galen, a Greek of the 3rd century BC who became the Roman Emperor's physician. Galen's voluminous writings on diseases, animal dissections and rigid training protocols for doctors, all became dogma. He spoke of the quackery of the times,

i.e. "druggists were the harbingers of death and most doctors were robbers!" His books remained the primary medical texts until the 16th century. In 1559, an English physician was made to apologize publicly to the College of Physicians in London for saying that Galen might be in error. Galen's secret was renewing the simplicity of the Hippocratic system. Into this vigorous, highly organized society came our hero, disease, in the guise of the Plague of Justinian, in the 3rd Century A. D. This epidemic killed 3.5 to 7 million Roman citizens over a 10-year period. This amounted to 25 to 35 % of the population.

By all we can judge, the Roman plagues of l65 AD and 251 AD were diseases new to the Roman Empire, diseases to which there was little or no immunity. Transportation in Italy was easy and rapid, so the epidemics spread quickly throughout the countryside. These diseases were characterized by fevers and skin eruptions, and may have been small pox and/or measles. The consequences were far-reaching. The countryside was denuded of farmers. Laws were passed forbidding a farmer to leave the land. When this proved inadequate, barbarian mercenaries from the North were hired to till the land in Italy. The mercenaries were a very valuable commodity and were kept peaceable with enormous subsidies from Rome. Meanwhile the more densely populated areas of the Mediterranean continued to be diminished by these new diseases, while the more isolated tribes in the north were healthier. By the 5th century AD, the power of the Western Roman Empire had become so diluted by barbarian immigrants, that the sack of Rome was an anticlimax. The intellectual genius of Athens and the engineering and political genius of the Roman Empire was no match for our hero, disease.

A New Western Culture Emerged

With the fall of the Roman Empire, the ability to travel easily, ceased. The roads and seas became dangerous. The populations became separated from each other. Between the 5th and l3th century AD, the city-states and feudalism were the dominant way of life, Christianity became popular. Then by the l4th century, populations were increasing and there was optimism. After generations of exposure, natural resistance to measles and small pox had developed. Many human epidemics became less virulent.

Christianity and specifically the Church felt that it was their duty to take care of the sick. The monasteries became hospices for the rich and poor. They were the repositories of the ancient medical texts. Monte Cassino, a Benedictine Monastery became the Mayo Clinic of the Dark Ages. Kings and paupers made their way there to obtain the cures found in the Greek, Arabian, and Jewish cultures. For the first time permanent homes for the sick were established in the form of hospitals, insane asylums, shelters for the homeless and orphanages. For instance, l9000 Leprosaria were established in Europe, 2000 in France alone. This humane isolation technique was successful in almost eradicating leprosy by the l6th century. The church expelled concubines from the cities and abolished the manufacturing and the use of dice. The dice factory survived by converting to the manufacturing of rosaries – I'm not sure what happened to the concubines. The combination of the church and feudalism produced enough money and surplus to take care of the needs of the sick, and created a new type of humanism. In the old Roman world there were no hospitals, orphanages, or insane asylums. Unwanted newborn infants were placed on the steps of the forum. If someone wanted a baby,

they took it, otherwise it died. An exception was the Roman field hospital for wounded and sick soldiers.

Into this expanding society, in l346, came the Black Plague. This was a new and devastating illness. There was no immunity to it and most of the people who came in contact with it died. In 40 years up to 50% of the population of Europe and Asia succumbed in the many passes this disease made over lands. It took over 200 years for the populations to recover to the 14th century level.

In our day, we cannot imagine the scope of this disaster. The worst and deadliest epidemic of modern times in Western Europe and America was the influenza epidemic in l9l8, where 40% of the population became ill but less than l% died. Yellow fever in 1793 killed l0% of the population of Philadelphia. An eyewitness there described the scene; “Fright and dismay knew no bounds. The bonds of society dissolved. Husbands fled from wives, parent’s deserted sick children, children fled from their sick parents. Government ground to a halt”. However, these epidemics hardly compare with the first pass of the Bubonic Plague in 1346, where 40% became ill and 80% of those died. By the 3rd epidemic in 1382, 25 million had died. The Church, who operated hospitals, schools, and most other paraphernalia of organized society, was decimated. Most of the clergy, mainly congregated in the cities, died. These men and women constituted a significant proportion of the existing managerial class.

The Church still had control of vast areas of land and the trappings of power. The voids due to death were quickly filled with what was left. Children were made Cardinals with great power, and were easily manipulated. Uneducated and poorly trained people took over the lands, monasteries and schools. The Church never really recovered, sank into more corruption

until the entire establishment became fragmented by the Reformation. During this time there was great social and moral disorganization. Farms were abandoned; famine, revolution and civil wars were everywhere. Jews as usual became the scapegoats and were massacred in great numbers. Flagellants beat themselves and each other. God had obviously disappeared and extreme cults developed. The rational theology of Thomas Aquinas of the l3th century seemed inadequate to explain this terrifying holocaust. Social structures rapidly changed. The secular city-states emerged. Feudalism and serfdom were replaced. Our hero had won an enormous battle against a seemingly impregnable combination of Church and State.

In taking a closer look at these diseases, we can see the horror of these infections. Small pox struck the saint and sinner alike. After a few days of fever, pustules broke out all over the victim's body. In the societies that had not had much previous exposure most died. One could have a beautiful fiancée or wife one day and a horribly deformed, sickly and scarred consort a short time later. The cause was a virus spread by direct contact or respiratory droplets. Over the centuries immunities developed so that many infected people survived albeit with considerable disfigurement. In the 6^{th} century, a Queen of a French principality, after recovering from small pox with a minimum of scarring, stopped all taxes, built homes for the poor and publicly repented her sins. On the other hand, another Queen with small pox (Austrigilde) decreed in her will: "all my doctors will have their throats cut when I die. Let my friends grieve for me and let the doctor's friends grieve for them." After her death two of her doctors were executed.

In India people have prayed for centuries to the small pox goddess named Rugabor (or Shitala). Apparently, Rugabar was the eldest and most beautiful daughter of a major god. She

is poetically described as "having a body tender as fresh leaves, her hair was like a bulbul nest, and her breasts were as soft as bael fruit". Her dad divided the world, but left her out. So, Rugabar tried to devour her dad, but he threw a bunch of seeds at her and gave her a mirror. When she saw how ugly she was (with small pox) she ate half the moon. Dad finally laid down the law and made Rugabar promise to attack only humans and to leave the moon alone. Without knowledge of viruses, that theory was as good as any.

The Black Plague or bubonic plague, the greatest holocaust the world has ever known is caused by bacteria, Yersinia Pestis – carried by migrating black rats. The infected developed a fever followed by large boils wherever one has lymph glands. These became open sores in the groin, neck and armpit, followed by death in 2-5 days. It was highly contagious. Keyholes were plugged to keep out the vapors; and fires were lit in the streets. Ironically, the rats and fleas who carried the bacteria escaped.

The bubonic plague appeared as an epidemic in 550 AD in Constantinople and killed approximately 700,000 people. This epidemic lasted 60 years and ended the Eastern Roman Empire. Then for some mysterious reason it disappeared for 800 years. In the 14th century, the plague would recur at irregular intervals until the l7th century when it became dormant. Among the remedies the least practical was the use of Plague Water called Eau-de-Cologne. The most practical was that of strict quarantine of ships and sailors. This was started by the Venetians in the 15th century. The last small USA epidemic was in l900 in San Francisco. It is curable with the appropriate antibiotic. The Black Plague lasted 300 years, culminating in a devastating epidemic in London in the l7th century. During the Middle Ages, measles, very contagious and very lethal, became a mild childhood disease to the Eurasian populations.

As we enter the l5th and l6th centuries, several events had an enormous impact on the world. The populations were recovering. Travel revived, and most impressive of all, ships were built that could and did circumnavigate the globe. This started a migration of 50 million Europeans to the New World.

Consider the conquest of Mexico. After Montezuma was killed by Cortes, the Mexicans routed Cortez and drove him out of Mexico City. At that same time an epidemic of small pox was raging in the Mexican capital among the Aztecs. The next four successors of Montezuma died of the disease. The population decreased from about 30 million to 3 million in less than five years. The Aztecs were in awe of these men who could live through this holocaust essentially untouched. The same fate befell the Inca Empire and Pizarro met no serious military resistance.

Our hero, disease, decimated the Indian populations of North and South America, wherever the Europeans came into contact with them. John Winthrop, the first governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony, stated in l634 – "For the natives, they are all near dead of small pox, for the lord hath cleared our title to what we have possessed." It is estimated that there were 400,000 to 700,000 Indians in Florida who all but disappeared (in the 15th century) because of European diseases. In California, there were an estimated 200,000 to 300,000 Indians when the Spanish came. Within a very short time only 60,000 fragmented people remained after small pox, measles, and tuberculosis had gone through their villages.

Syphilis

The New World had few diseases with which to retaliate. The most virulent was syphilis that came from the West Indies in a lethal form. Some think the crew of Columbus brought syphilis to the Old World. In the 15th century most Europeans who contracted the disease died as it spread rapidly throughout Europe. Over a period of time it gradually became less virulent. So many had the disease it was called the "gentleman's disease." This changed when the church found out that it was transmitted by sexual intercourse. It became synonymous with sin. Syphilis was recognized as a venereal disease for the first time in Aberdeen, Scotland in l497. The Town council decreed, "that all light women desist from their sin of venery in pain of being branded on their cheek and banishment from the town.

Books can and should be written about the organic brain problems from syphilis suffered by the great leaders and movers of the world. Zinsser commented, "so many brilliant men have had syphilis, much of the world's greatest achievements were formulated in brains whose cerebrum was stimulated by the syphilitic spirochete". Henry VIII changed the course of England while afflicted during his adult life with syphilis. " Others thought to have syphilis include Napoleon, Al Capone, Van Gogh, Hitler, Howard Hughes, Leo Tolstoy, and Oscar Wilde.

Our Hero Was Successful

Medicine during the years of the dark and Middle Ages remained quite primitive. There were hardly any useful drugs, though enormous numbers of concoctions were tried. Due to underfunding, hospitals, insane asylums, et al, became snake pits, and places to be avoided at all costs. The first breakthrough in medicine came in the l6th century when Pope Innocent III

allowed dissection of human cadavers. Up to this time no other culture or religion had allowed this. Galen and Hippocrates, for all their astute observations, had never dissected cadavers. Finally, doctors began to learn the functions of the body in relation to the organs. Artists spearheaded medical advance. Leonardo da Vinci dissected over 30 bodies. The Renaissance doctor had very few cures up his sleeve. He sold hope, and usually made the patient worse by bleeding and laxatives.

Gunpowder turned wars into slaughter pits, which was a boon to the development of surgery. Surgeons became quite dexterous in treatment of fractures and deep wounds. Armies won battles, but more often than not disease was the main enemy. Let's ask the regimental surgeon about the failures of these great armies, a litany of lost battles. The Persian, Xerxes, was turned back from the conquest of Greece when 300,000 of his 800,000 men died during an epidemic. In l090 AD, the 300,000 man army of Crusaders was defeated by our hero, disease, when all but 20,000 were killed without a single battle being fought. Kerkhove, Napoleon's Army surgeon described the Russian campaign where 500,000 troops arrived in Moscow and in the end, 80,000 left the city. Most had died of typhus and dysentery. Only 20,000 of these returned to France.

During our Civil War 93,000 Federal troops died of their wounds in battle and l86, 000 died of disease. Again, typhus and dysentery were the predominant killers. The illness to death ratio was about 3.1 during the civil war – so you can imagine the impact. Typhus is a disease caused by the Ricketsial virus, characterized by a terrible headache, fever up to l06 degrees and a rash. First noticed in the l6th century, it was carried by rats and lice and played havoc with the armies and the crowded poor.

Counter Offensive

Our hero, disease, lost some significant battles in the l8th and l9th centuries when quantum leaps were made in the medical world. Jenner could prevent small pox with cowpox vaccination. Pasteur finally looked into the dung heap with Leuwenhoek's microscope and found bacteria. It wasn't until the l9th century that the body cavities could be safely opened with the help of anesthesia. The 20th century has compounded these successes with antibiotics, better vaccines, and the total elimination of small pox and polio. The last case of small pox was that of Mrs. Parker, who contacted the virus from a London Lab accident. Professor Henry Bedson, the head of that lab and world authority on small pox committed suicide. The virus is being kept alive in Russian and American labs. It is postulated that the Russians could send several immigrants to New York infected with the disease and millions would die before vaccinations could become useful.

The African continent remains a captive of our hero. Europeans that thought they could change the human agricultural and herding patterns of the Africans were wrong. The continent's water supply is contaminated by the liver fluke causing shistosomiasis. This is a debilitating disease and precludes widespread irrigation, as we know it. The wetter lands of Africa are infested with malaria, a killer and also a cause of chronic illness. The natives of the Savannah's of East Africa suffer from sleeping sickness transmitted by the Tsetse fly. The epidemics do not leave and allow society to reconstruct and repair, but they are continuous diseases that sap the strength and denigrate the mind. The continent that contains the bones of the oldest known human, the cradle of civilization, remains a biologically inhospitable land.

We have seen a different world looking through this keyhole. Our world continues to be shaped by disease. Our hero, disease, has won many battles. He finds new viruses such as the AIDS virus and new avenues that mortally wound our societies. We can plug the keyholes, and light fires in the streets, but beware of mosquitoes that can fly through second story windows.

November 11, 2013

Poems

Bruce Sams
2014

Lunches With Larry

A bond binds those who age together
Who look at the future less sure of delight,
Whose lease on life is a fraying tether
But who cling to their lives with all of their might.
A bonding takes place that youth can't feel,
Confluence of values all forged in the past,
Re-kindling of interest, fire, and zeal,
With flag still flying from top of the mast.
These feelings bound us as if by suture
While weighing God, Obama, Super-bowl.
We argued, debated, as we drafted the future
Unwilling to take an onlookers role.
Our lunches thumbed noses at time's swift flow
May these be the last of my memories to go.

Rattlesnake

I stepped onto the woodshed floor.
I saw and heard a rattlesnake.
A big one, coiled, with rattles going.
A good five feet and maybe more,
Darting tongue; broad head to-and-froing.

He wasn't near enough to strike.
I watched him for a time.
No choice but that I get the gun
And take him out Soprano-style.
But not for anything he'd done.

He lives in his own universe.
Would see my wife or dog as threat
And strike to keep himself from harm.
And I, fearing him, must now strike first
For neither of us can agree to disarm.

Yet I don't know if he'd glide away,
Just take a rat from my pile of wood
Then return to his mate and progeny.
What rivers of blood has this world shed
By the need to kill prophylactically?

Enlightenment

When at first I heard of it
I thought it bordered on the weird
with little to its credit.

Then I heard a man I know who seemed to think
it likely so

And on reflection I could see
the faintest possibility.

I read a blog that deemed it true and heard the same
on Channel Two.

The argument (though porous), began to carry water.

One afternoon I poured some wine and having nothing else to do
slowly swirled the matter through.

The formless floating facts congealed. Doubt vaporized, certainty
descaled my eyes.

Joy bathed me in its gentle glow. Now at last
I know, I know!

I float serenely over the fray. No longer need
to scrutinize.
Contrarians are heretics, all criticism
simply lies.

Faith now my castle, moat intact,
Impregnable to doubt or fact.

Shear Lunacy

I trailed a lumbering livestock truck
On a rainy Highway 101.
I thought of ourselves and other mammals,
How we pad our pocket at their expense.
How we rob their udders in the milking shed,
Take hide and hair without recompense,
Enjoy their flesh with our favorite vino.
I fancied the truck to be carrying sheep,
Huddled together, soon to be sheared.
The rain abated. I saw the truck
Was really just a gaming bus,
Bound with its mammals to the new casino.

These mammals, however, had *volunteered*
To bring their fleece so it could be sheared.

Art's Appreciation

I hang up here on this stark white wall
As down below you meander by
Nibbling off culture from the fruit in the hall,
Grazing about with insensitive eye.

You rudely stare at my painted face
Then murmur an inane pleasantry.
"I'd like it over our fireplace".
Diamond tiara on a chimpanzee.

Your glance as vacant as an overpriced flat,
But you want to be sure to see it all.
Perfunctory as a bureaucrat,
You drift to the next Old Master down the hall.

I was born of passion and cheap red wine.
I've a history as rich as Parisian sauce.
The caves begin my ancestral line.
I sold for more than crown jewels cost.

I hang here to let you appreciate me.
But since that is something you cannot do,
I'll let my darkest thoughts run free
And dream sweet dreams of hanging you.

The Consultant

A wise old fish lived deep in the sea.
All agreed he was a finny sage.
A model for fishes and furthermore
For crabs and eels and the stingaree
And anything else outboard of the shore.

A younger fish (say the old wives' tales)
Sought the sage's advice on the wavy world
So he too could live to a ripe old age,
Have barnacles grow on his wrinkled scales,
Swim in the center of the stage.

Here is the advice the old fish floated.
Refuse all offers to spawn upstream.
Avoid bright flies, they carry hooks.
Don't tell a shark how he should have voted,
Don't swallow all you read in books.

As the old fish spoke his voice grew weak.
The young fish cruised up close to hear.
Rheumatic jaws snapped with a crunch.
The old sage smirked, said tongue-in-cheek,
"He asked how a fish can get a free lunch."

Selling The Ranch

My fields are free of pesticide,
My cattle know no drugs.
My springs slake thirst of every beast,
My fences keep the world outside.

I've seen the turkey resurrect.
The quail and band-tailed pigeon thrive.
Nocturnal creatures feed and play,
Mountain lions prowl unchecked.

I befriended Nature, my matriarch.
Yet she won't return the favor to me.
Though the land demands the sweat of youth
She stubbornly won't turn back my clock.

My pen will deed away flesh and feather,
Old oaks, and creeks, and verdant pastures,
Corrals and stalls and watering trough,
Starry nights, and smell of saddle leather.

The sale will take my key away.
But the alchemy of memory
Will let me trespass every day.

Dinner Party Politics

"History tells us" they like to say
As if history were the same as fact,
As if fact weren't filtered through the mind
And the mind a mill for molding bias.
And bias, like weeds, blooms unconfined.

"Once the truth is known" they like to say
All sides will simply agree to agree.
The allure of truth will dominate.
But truth we know is built on fact,
And fact we've seen can fluctuate.

If fact is just a point of view,
And truth is playing peek-a-boo,
And your Emperor, you fear, is au natural
Just pick the points that buttress you
And shout at a higher decibel.

The Bridge

Arching splendiferously, arching with class.
    In summer and winter, hot spell or chill,
The cars move incessantly, sipping their gas.
    Beauty incarnate yet part of the mill.

Arching spectacularly, arching with style.
    An artwork caressed by diaphanous fog.
Commuters soar up on this breath-taking mile
    While below them waves whisper in sea dialogue.

Arching inspiringly, arching with grace.
    Though you're pedal to metal not to be late
Text thanks to your God that you live in a place
    Where your rat-race leads over the Golden Gate.

My Oak Tree

Older than I,
I'm sure.
A hundred years at Nature's breast,
sun and rain for sustenance,
storms to give it strength.
My oak boasts a massive trunk
a posterchild for permanence.

Yet my next-door neighbor's oak,
equally as old and vast
split off a branch
which crushed his roof,
as if to rudely emphasize
Permanence won't last.

The Blue Horse – A Painting By Franz Marc

He fills the eye. He dominates this land
Of yellow, green, magenta, purple, blue.
He wears a pensive look, but seems to stand
Well-braced, alert, perhaps as if he knew
That I was watching him. I fear that he
Will gallop off over the vivid hill
Leaving an empty space on the red-green lea.
He stays with me, somewhat against his will.
A horse of blue is certainly no earthly horse.
A god, I think, who took this handsome mold
To flaunt his strength and grace; to be a source
For adulation. Nature's spirit, free and bold.
    In ages past, in smoky cave and dim,
    I knew him on a wall and worshiped him.

Fat Heads

Now they warn us they've all been wrong.
Their science more fable than fact.
They've studied the studies that found that fat
Would foul the freeways to your heart—
And found, in truth, they didn't show that.

So fifty years later abrupt about face.
Now fats *don't* lead to heart disease.
But *carbs* have made our jeans too tight,
Unleashed a flood of insulin,
Now its diabetes that we must fight.

How could science botch it so badly?
Original studies were badly flawed.
Still, brains and training jumped on board,
Sniffed success from riding this rising star,
And the snowball grew of its own accord.

PhDs found funds to study the topic,
From (guess who) the venders of veggie oil.
Cardiologists themselves caroled this notion,
Pressed the case to impressionable patients.
Assured the snowball stay in motion.

Science always knows the truth
But over time the truth keeps shifting.
A skeptic might find this fact alarming,
But I vow not to let it void my new faith.
Science *can't* be wrong about global warming.

How To Tell The World's Best Wine

You can go
to enology school
or study the ranking
by wine gurus,
look at the price
in the beverage store
or read the pages
of gourmet news.

Consult with friends
who swirl and sniff,
haunt the tastings
at the fairs,
learn the magic
of sugar and acid,
get an app that gives
a wine's best years.

Or cork that cask
of conflicting views
and pour good sense
and simplicity.
Since *I* am going to drink the stuff
the best is what tastes best to *me.*

The Halfway House

Inside my head for quick recall
The joy I felt on meeting you,
Our courtship, wedding, honeymoon.
But, I'm not so sure on bridesmaids' names,
Or what your mother wore.

I recall the night of our first child's birth,
But not the name of the doctor.
I've lost some names of childhood friends
But am still pretty good with faces.

I'm in memory's half-way house.
Some are gone, some remain.

It hurts to think the rest will go,
Go off to God knows where.
But I live in hope that when all are gone,
I won't remember why I should care.

It Is What?

When you close your eyes and swing and the ball goes out the park,
    It is luck.
When your frantic aimless probing finds the keyhole in the dark,
    It is luck.
When you spill wine on your hostess and it doesn't leave a mark,
When the burglar skips your house because a dog begins to bark,
When the rains begin in earnest and you've a ticket on the Ark,
    It is luck, it is luck, it is luck.

When your children play with fire and the curtains do not burn,
    It is luck.
When the doctor hears your symptoms and listens with concern,
    It is luck.
When your rate of losing knowledge isn't faster than you learn,
When your troubles try to board you but you leave them all astern,
When you find the only woman and she loves you in return,
    It is luck, it is luck, it is luck.

When you make it through the hassles to a geriatric age,
    It is luck.
When the family gets together and they give you center stage
    It is luck.
When friends pretend to listen as though you were a sage,
When you need a name from memory and the gears at last engage,
When you see your name escaping the obituary page,
    It is luck, it is luck, it is luck.

It's just a lucky happening, just a freak of chance,
    It is luck.
It's rolling dice, a spinning wheel, a senseless random dance.
    It is luck.
We can beg and pray, beseech the sky with supplicating glance.
We can search for cause or reason from a mountaintop or trance,
But the everlasting answer has been known far in advance.
    It is luck, it is luck, it is luck.

EVENING

Ranch [redacted]

My favorite show comes on at five.
We've front row seats on our deck outside.
We face the west, where over the hills
The clouds are putting their make-up on
And awaiting the curtain at eventide.

Characters drift on stage from our right
And change their shape before our eyes.
A camel, a whale, a submarine
Now a horse with flaming tail.
Every actor a fresh surprise.

Color changes right on cue, the set
An ample palette. Intense red drives out the gray
Until we fear the sky's on fire.
The theme is change: in size, in shape, in hue-
until it simply fades away.

What a glorious way for a day to die.
Would mortals could fade so beautifully
With a sunset as their kiss good-bye

No Help

My dog will often stare at me
with a quizzical look
in her loving eyes
as if to ask
omniscient me
where I came from,
why I'm here.
From where did I materialize?

Who decreed that
I enter her life?
Who will decide
if I go or stay?
Who can she request
to keep me near?
It isn't just language that thwarts my reply.
I frequently stare at my wife that way.

Seasoning

The hush that comes
with the setting sun,
benediction
of the breeze.
Water cavorting
down the creek,
balmy shade
under ancient trees.

The song of birds
as dawn floods in.
Whistle as the winds
slip through.
The gentle rain
in early fall,
rising sun on
morning dew.

Nature’s best, but to be frank
it all seems flat
until I see it new with you
as you turn up my rheostat.

Forces

Whenever we part
        the sun goes down
and the world grows colder,
        more forlorn.
When again we meet,
        up comes the sun.
The world's a toasty flannel gown.

Galileo would chide
        the skies above
if he saw the way you
        control my sun.
Unless, of course,
        in addition to stars,
he understood the power of love.

Thank God

Out of darkness,
the Good Book says,
God created the universe.
The roaring, crashing, salty sea,
the gentle plains,
the soothing hills,
and mountains that rise like ecstasy.

The wild, majestic, untamed wolf,
improbable, whirring hummingbird.
Chipmunk, mouse,
provident squirrel.
Sequoias stretching
for the clouds,
all marvels of this earthly world,

classed among
God's premier creations.
Yet some contain
small imperfections.
God, after all, was learning, too.
Now evolution's culmination.
He's made the lovely, loving you.

EUGENE ONEGIN

A Novel in Verse
by
Alexander Pushkin

Book 3
Part 2

Elle était fille, elle était amoureuse.
—Malfilatre

Rendered into English
by
S. Hamm

Literal translation
by
Vladimir Nabokov

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23.

Amid a crowd of suitors, fawning
With compliments and fervent sighs,
You'll see these jaded lovelies yawning—
And yet I've found, to my surprise,
Their manner is so petrifying
That timid beaux may give up trying,
But these girls have the scary knack
Of luring skittish lovers back:
If only by commiserating,
By offering a kindly word,
Perhaps the first he's ever heard;
And soon he's back to celebrating
The one who fed him such a crumb—
For love is blind, and deaf, and dumb.

Amidst obedient admirers,
Other odd females I have seen,
Conceitedly indifferent
To sighs impassioned and eloges:
And what, to my amazement, did I find?
They, by austere demeanor,
Frightening timid love,
Had the knack of attracting it again,
At least by their compassion;
At least the sound of spoken words
Sometimes would seem more [tender].
And with credulous blindness
Again the youthful lover
Pursued dear vanity.

24.

Tatiana, too, may be a sinner,
But tell me: what is her offense?
Is it the dream that blooms within her,
And fuels her artless innocence?
Her girlish trust? The wild emotion
That undergirds her deep devotion?
The fact she cannot tell a lie,
Or that she has been gifted by
The gods with wild imagination,
Intelligence, a stubborn will,
The recklessness of passion's thrill,
A heart that burns with adoration?
What is it you accuse her of?
Can't you forgive a girl in love?

Why is Tatiana, then, more guilty?
Is it because in dear simplicity
She does not know deceit
And in her chosen dream believes?
Is it because she loves without art,
Obedient to the bent of feeling?
Because she is so trustful,
Because by heaven is endowed
With a restless imagination,
Intelligence, and a live will,
And headstrongness,
And a flaming and tender heart?
Can it be that you won't forgive her
The thoughtlessness of passions?

25.

The flirt is ruled by cool ambition—
But that is not Tatiana's way;
She yields to love without condition,
Just like a child. She does not say,
"My dear, let's wait a little longer—
For waiting makes our love grow stronger!"
That's how the flirt will bait her trap:
She'll give his vanity a slap,
Then offer hope, and then deny it,
And if he tries to call it quits,
She'll send him into jealous fits.
For steady love's too rich a diet:
The cunning captive soon responds
By scheming to escape his bonds.

The coquette reasons coolly;
Tatiana in dead earnest loves
And unconditionally yields
To love like a dear child.
She does not say: Let us defer;
Thereby we shall augment love's value,
Inveigle into toils more surely;
Let us first prick vainglory
With hope; then with perplexity
Harass a heart, and then
Revive it with a jealous fire,
For otherwise, cloyed with delight,
The cunning captive from his shackles
Hourly is ready to escape.

26.

A final hazard is awaiting:
If Russia's honor is to be
Preserved, the burden of translating
Tatiana's letter falls to me.
Her grasp of Russian prose was meager—
Our journals never did intrigue her—
And in her native tongue she fought
To verbalize the simplest thought.
That's why she wrote in French: for sadly,
It's true that, as I've said above,
No lady has expressed her love
In Russian prose, however badly.
Our noble tongue's ill-suited to
The rigors of the *billet-doux*.

Another hindrance I foresee:
Saving the honor of my native land,
Undoubtedly I'll be obliged
Tatiana's letter to translate.
She knew Russian badly,
Did not read our reviews,
And expressed herself with difficulty
In her native tongue;
Hence wrote in French.
What's to be done about it! I repeat again,
As yet a lady's love
Has not expressed itself in Russian,
As yet our proud tongue has
To postal prose not got accustomed.

27.

One modern school of thought proposes
All girls read Russian. How obscene!
Why should they stick their pretty noses
In *Good Intentions* magazine?
My poets, let me ask sincerely:
Think of the ones you loved most dearly,
To whom you wrote those secret rhymes
In hopes they would forgive your crimes,
To whom your heart was dedicated—
Did not you find them full of charm
When they would do our language harm?
They mangled it!—yet navigated
A foreign tongue's complexities
As native speakers do, with ease.

I know: some would make ladies
Read Russian. Horrible indeed!
Can I imagine them
With *The Well-Meaner* in their hands?
My poets, I appeal to [you]!
Is it not true that the amiable objects
For whom, to expiate your sins,
In secret you wrote verses,
To whom your heart you dedicated—
Did not they all, the Russian tongue
Wielding poorly, and with difficulty,
So amiably garble it,
And on their lips a foreign tongue
Did not it turn into a native one?

NOTE: *Good Intentions* (literally, *The Well-Intentioned*) was a prominent Moscow literary magazine edited by A.E. Izmaylov, whom Pushkin was known to mock in private correspondence.

28.

God help me not to dwell upon it:
That I might meet, outside the ball,
An academic in a bonnet,
A scholar in a yellow shawl!
If ruby lips that pout politely
Seem nicer when you smudge them slightly,
Then so do our linguistic laws;
I like my Russian full of flaws.
These modern belles who so delight us
May, as our pundits now expect,
Become grammatically correct—
Or even write in verse, to spite us.
What should we do? Well, I don't care.
I like the past. I'm staying there.

The Lord forbid my meeting at a ball
Or at its breakup, on the porch,
A seminarian in a yellow shawl,
Or an academician in a bonnet!
As vermeil lips without a smile,
With no grammatical mistake
I don't like Russian speech.
Perchance (it would be my undoing!)
A generation of new belles,
The pleading voice of journals having heeded,
To Grammar will inure us;
Verses will be brought into use.
Yet I . . . what do I care?
I shall be true to ancientry.

29.

A sloppy choice of words, a stutter,
An inexact delivery,
Will cause my heart to skip and flutter;
That's how it's always been with me.
I'm proudly unapologetic;
There's room in my antique aesthetic
For Gallicisms, boyhood sins,
The lines that Bogdanovich pens . . .
But that's enough; to my displeasure,
This daunting task must now be faced,
Alas! I gave my word in haste,
And now I must repent at leisure.
If only tender Parny's style
Were back in fashion for a while . . .

An incorrect, negligent patter,
An inexact delivery of words,
As heretofore a flutter of the heart
Will in my breast produce;
In me there's no force to repent;
To me will Gallicisms remain as dear
As the sins of past youth,
As Bogdanovich's verse.
But that will do. 'Tis time to occupy myself
With my fair damsel's letter;
My word I've given—and what now? Yea, yea!
I'm now quite ready to back out.
I know: tender Parny's
Pen in our days is out of fashion.

NOTE: Ukranian poet and translator I.F. Bogdanovich (1743-1803) wrote the long narrative poem *Dushen'ka,* based on LaFontaine's *Psyche et Cupidon.* Pushkin admired him for bringing the cadences of everyday speech to poetry.

NOTE: "Parny" is Evariste-Desire Desforges, Chevalier de Parny (1753-1814), a Frenchman whose *Poesies erotiques* made a great impression on Pushkin and his contemporaries.

30.

Dear poet of *The Feasts,* I savor
Your languor and your mournfulness;
You are not here to grant a favor,
But I would ask you nonetheless
To translate, in your brilliant fashion,
A maid's outlandish words of passion
Into a magic rhapsody;
My rights I grant you happily,
For you alone can tell the story!
Alas, you are condemned to roam,
Far from the praise you knew at home,
Through barren, craggy territory
Beneath a distant Finnish sky,
And cannot hear my woeful cry.

Bard of *The Feasts* and languorous melancholy,
If you were still with me,
I would have with an indiscreet request,
My dear fellow, importuned you:
That into magic strains
You would transpose a passionate maid's
Outlandish words.
Where are you? Come! My rights
I with a bow transfer to you . . .
But in the midst of woeful rocks,
His heart disused from praise,
Alone, under the Finnish sky
He wanders, and his soul
Hears not my worry.

NOTE: Yevgeny Abramovich Baratynsky (1800-1844) was exiled to an outpost in Finland after being expelled from military school for theft. *The Feasts* is a poetic reminiscence of his youthful days in St. Petersburg, when he first came to know Pushkin.

31.

Tatiana's letter. I unfold it.
I've kept it with me all these years.
My heart is bursting as I hold it.
I read it always through my tears.
Who taught her to convey such feeling
In words so careless and appealing,
So wild and sweet? How could she know
The silliest of words might show
The depth of love's delight and torture?
—Your baffled servant here assays
A partial, feeble paraphrase:
A painting by a clumsy forger,
Der Freischutz inexpertly played
By some unpracticed, timid maid.

Tatiana's letter is before me;
Religiously I keep it;
I read it with a secret heartache
And cannot get my fill of reading it.
Who taught her both this tenderness
And amiable carelessness of words?
Who taught her all that touching [tosh],
Mad conversation of the heart,
Both fascinating and injurious?
I cannot understand. But here's
An incomplete, feeble translation,
The pallid copy of a vivid picture,
Or *Freischutz* executed
By timid female learners' fingers.

Tatiana's Letter to Onegin

I write you with my full admission.
What else is there that I could say?
And now it must be your decision
What penalty I'll have to pay.
But if you know my sad condition
And feel a glimmer of regret,
You won't abandon me just yet.
At first I vowed I'd never mention
The shame for which I here atone;
In fact, you never would have known
If you had had the least intention
Of visiting, just once a week,
So I could see you, hear you speak,
Or just exchange a friendly greeting,
And then, as soon as you were gone,
Endure the week by dwelling on
The prospect of another meeting.

I write to you—what would one more?
What else is there that I could say?
'Tis now, I know, within your will
To punish me with scorn.
But you, for my unhappy lot
Keeping at least one drop of pity,
You'll not abandon me.
At first, I wanted to be silent;
Believe me: of my shame
You would never have known
If I had had the hope,
Even seldom, even once a week,
To see you at our country place,
Only to hear your speeches,
To say a word to you, and then
To think and think about one thing,
Both day and night, till a new meeting.

But no; you don't like company,
They say, and rustic life must bore you.
True—we don't "glitter" much, but we
Still had a heartfelt welcome for you.

What brought you to this backward place?
I might have spent my life in hiding;
I might have never seen your face,
Or known despair so overriding.
My girlish hopes might be subsiding;
If time had calmed my inner strife,
Who knows? —I might have found another,
Become a faithful wife and mother,
And lived a fairly happy life.

But, they say, you're unsociable;
In backwoods, in the country, all bores you,
While we . . . with nothing do we glitter,
Though simpleheartedly we welcome you.

Why did you visit us?
In the backwoods of a forgotten village,
I would never have known you
Nor have known bitter torment.
The tumult of an inexperienced soul
Having subdued with time (who knows?)
I would have found a friend after my heart,
Have been a faithful wife
And a virtuous mother.

Another! . . . What a foolish notion.
There's no one else on earth for me.
You have my absolute devotion,
For I am yours by God's decree.
My prior life was but a token
In promise of the day when I
Would find you. And now God has spoken:
You are my guardian till I die . . . .
From dreams you were familiar to me,
And, sight unseen, I held you dear;
For in my soul your voice rang clear;
Your wondrous gaze sent raptures through me.
But I was wide awake, you see,
The night I met you—living, breathing;
My body shook. My blood was seething.
The dream was true, I thought. *It's he!*

Another! . . . No, to nobody on earth
Would I have given my heart away!
That has been destined in a higher council,
That is the will of heaven: I am thine;
My entire life has been the gage
Of a sure tryst with you;
I know, you're sent to me by God,
You are my guardian to the tomb . . . .
You had appeared to me in dreams,
Unseen, you were already dear to me,
Your wondrous glance pervaded me with languor,
Your voice resounded in my soul
Long since . . . No, it was not a dream!
Scarce had you entered, instantly I knew you,
I felt all faint, I felt aflame,
And in my thoughts I uttered: It is he!

Was I so foolish for believing
It was your voice that spoke to me
When I would help the sick and grieving,
Or when I prayed to God, receiving
His comfort in my misery?
And was it not, this very second,
Beloved vision, you who beckoned,
Who came to me in blackest night,
Who knelt beside my bed, consoled me,
And in a gentle whisper told me
The words of hope that eased my plight?
What are you? Angel of salvation,
Or tempter, bent on my damnation?

But you can take away all doubt.
Perhaps I'm but a child, pretending
Her silly dreams might come about,
When fate has planned a different ending . . . .

Is it not true that it was you I heard:
You in the stillness spoke to me
When I would help the poor
Or assuage with a prayer
The yearning of my agitated soul?
And at this very moment,
Was it not you, dear vision,
That slipped through the transparent darkness,
Softly bent close to my bed head?
Was it not you that with [joy] and love
Words of hope whispered to me?
Who are you? My guardian angel
Or a perfidious tempter?

Resolve my doubts.
Perhaps, 'tis nonsense all,
An inexperienced soul's delusion,
And some quite different thing is destined . . . .

So be it, then. My destiny
Forevermore is in your keeping;
I pray that you will safeguard me.
I stand before you helpless, weeping.
No one is as alone as I,
No one can know what I am feeling:
Imagine it! My mind is reeling,
And if I cannot speak, I die.
So will you give your answer to me?
—Restore my hope with but a glance,
Or shatter this hypnotic trance
With all the scorn I know is due me?

Farewell! I send this off unread,
So deep is my humiliation.
Your honor is a pledge unsaid.
I trust it without hesitation.

But so be it! My fate
Henceforth I place into your hands,
Before you I shed tears,
For your defense I plead.
Imagine: I am here alone,
None understands me,
My reason is breaking down,
And, silent, I must perish.
I'm waiting for you: with a single look
Revive my heart's hopes,
Or interrupt the heavy dream
Alas, with a deserved rebuke!

I close! I dread to read this over.
I'm faint with shame and fear . . .
But to me your honor is a pledge,
And boldly I entrust myself to it.

32.

By turns Tatiana's gasping, sighing;
The letter trembles in her hand;
The waxen sealing disk is drying
Upon a tongue as hot as sand.
And soon her weary head is tipping,
And soon her negligee is slipping
Down from her shoulders. Now the moon
Grows paler in the sky. And soon
A distant vale will be appearing
Through lifting fog; and soon a gleam
Of silver light will paint the stream;
And soon the town will wake, on hearing
The herdsman's horn, when dawn has come;
But Tanya to the world is numb.

By turns Tatiana sighs and ohs,
The letter trembles in her hand;
The pink wafer dries
On her fevered tongue.
Her poor head shoulderward she has inclined;
Her light chemise has slid
Down from her charming shoulder.
But now already the moonbeam's
Radiance fades. Anon the valley
Grows through the vapor clear. Anon the stream
Starts silvering. Anon the horn
Of the herdsman wakes up the villager.
Here's morning; all have risen long ago:
To my Tatiana it is all the same.

33.

She takes no notice of the hour.
The letter's left her overtaxed.
Her head is bowed. She lacks the power
To press her seal upon the wax.
The doorknob turns; the gray and doting
Filatievna, almost floating,
Appears with tea upon a tray.
"Wake up, my pretty one, it's day . . .
My goodness, child, you've finished dressing!
Aren't you the early bird! Last night
You gave me such an awful fright—
But now you're better. What a blessing!
I halfway thought I'd find you dead,
But now your cheeks are rosy-red."

She takes no notice of the sunrise;
She sits with lowered head
And on the letter does not
Impress her graven seal.
But, softly opening the door,
Now gray Filatievna for her
Brings tea upon a tray.
"'Tis time, my child, get up;
Why, pretty one, you're ready!
Oh, my early birdie!
I was indeed so anxious yesternight—
But glory be to God, you're well!
No trace at all of the night's fret!
Your face is like a poppy flower."

34.

"Oh, help me, nurse. You must protect me."
"Why, darling! Anything you ask."
"It's not—I can't—They'll all suspect me!
If you could do one simple task . . ."
"By God, I shall, if I am able!"
"Then fetch your grandson from the stable
And have him take this note to O—
I mean . . . the neighbor. Let him know
The job is to be done discreetly—
And tell him not to mention me!"
"To *whom,* my dear? I'm slow, you see,
And I don't understand completely.
So many neighbors come to call
That I can barely count them all."

"Oh, nurse, do me a favor."
"Willingly, darling, order me."
"Don't think . . . Really . . . Suspicion . . .
But you see . . . Oh, do not refuse!"
"My friend, here's God to you for pledge."
"Well, send your grandson quietly
With this note to O . . . to that . . .
To the neighbor. And let him be told
That he ought not to say a word,
That he ought not to name me."
"To *whom,* my dear?
I'm getting muddled nowadays.
There's lots of neighbors all around
Even to count them over is beyond me."

35.

“Oh, nurse! Must you be so dimwitted?”
“I’m old, my dear, and that’s the truth.
My mind is blunted—I admit it—
But I was sharper in my youth.
The master barely had to mention—“
“Oh, nurse, I wish you’d pay attention!
Your mental state’s irrelevant
Until my letter has been sent.
Now take it to Onegin—quickly!”
“Ohhh, *now* I get you. Don’t be vexed.
It’s true I’m easily perplexed,
But . . . Tanya, dear—you’re looking sickly!”
“It’s nothing, nurse. Do as I say
And send your grandson straightaway.”

“Oh, nurse, how slow-witted you are!”
“Friend of my heart, I am already old,
Old; blunted grows the reason, Tanya;
But time was, I used to be sharp:
Time was, one word of master’s wish . . . “
“Oh, nurse, nurse, is this relevant?
What matters your intelligence to me?
You see, it is about a letter,
To Onegin.” “Well, this makes sense.
Do not be angry, my dear soul;
I am, you know, not comprehensive . . .
But why have you turned pale again?”
“Never mind, nurse, ‘tis really nothing.
Send, then, your grandson.”

36.

No answer as the day progresses.
Another day gone: nothing yet.
At dawn Tatiana wakes, and dresses,
Pale as a ghost, to pace and fret.
A carriage comes, but as expected,
It's Olga's beau. "We feel neglected,"
Tatiana hears her mother say;
"Your colleague's never out this way!"
And now the poor girl's face grows redder.
"I know he planned on dropping by,"
Is Lenski's politic reply;
"I think he's busy with . . . a letter."
Tatiana winces, having heard
A cruel rebuke in every word.

But the day lapsed, and no reply.
Another came up; nothing yet.
Pale as a shade, since morning dressed,
Tatiana waits: when is it coming, the reply?
Olga's adorer drove up.
"Tell me, where's your companion?"
Was the chatelaine's question to him;
"He seems to have forgotten us entirely."
Tatiana, flushing, quivered.
"He promised he would be today,"
Lenski replied to the old dame,
"But evidently the mail has detained him."
Tatiana dropped her gaze
As if hearing an unkind rebuke.

37.

At twilight on the table glittered
A samovar, and as it hissed,
The Chinese pot atop it jittered,
Enshrouded in a swirl of mist.
Now Olga holds the teapot steady
Above the cups; the tea is ready,
And as she pours the fragrant stream,
A boy stands by to serve the cream.
My mournful Tanya, as she faces
The darkened window, can’t refrain
From sighing; on the icy pane
A fog appears, and there she traces
With one small finger, daintily,
The lovely letters *O* and *E*.

’Twas growing dark; upon the table, shining,
There hissed the evening samovar,
Warming the Chinese teapot;
Light vapor undulated under it.
Poured out by Olga’s hand,
Into the cups, in a dark stream,
The fragrant tea already ran,
And a footboy served the cream;
Tatiana stood before the window;
Breathing on the cold panes,
Lost in thought, the dear soul
Wrote with her charming finger
On the bemisted glass
The cherished monogram: an O and E.

38.

Tatiana's tortured soul is aching,
Her eyes are full of acrid tears,
When hoofbeats set the ground to shaking;
And closer! —closer! — now appears—
Onegin! "Ach!" The poor girl's jolted,
And lighter than a shade, she's bolted
From hall to porch, from porch to yard;
She runs, and runs, and runs so hard
She dares not look back as she pushes
From flowerbed, to bridge, to lawn,
Past lake and thicket, racing on,
And trampling the lilac bushes,
Until at last she finds the stream—
And falls, and falls, as in a dream . . .

And meantime her soul pined,
And full of tears was her dolorous gaze.
Suddenly, hoof thuds! Her blood froze.
Now nearer! Coming fast . . . and in the yard
Is Eugene! "Ach"—and lighter than a shade
Tatiana skips into another hallway,
From porch outdoors, and straight into the garden;
She flies, flies—glance back
Dares not; has traversed in a trice
Platbands, footbridges, lawn,
The avenue to the lake, the bosquet;
Has broken bushes, lilac,
Flying across the flower plots to the brook,
And panting, on a bench

39.

. . . Onto a bench. “Eugene’s appearing!
Good God, what must he think of me?”
A scrap of hope is persevering
Somewhere amid the agony.
She trembles now, her face afire.
Where is he? Wait. She hears a choir
Of servant girls, who laugh and sing
As they go berry-gathering.
(They sing on orders from their master,
Who’s figured out a simple trick:
If girls are singing as they pick,
They’ll eat much less, and pick much faster.
Thus everyone will benefit!
—A testament to rural wit.)

Has dropped. “He’s here! Eugene is here!
Good God, what did he think!”
Her heart, full of torments,
Retains an obscure dream of hope;
She trembles, and glows hotly,
And waits: does he not come? But hears not.
Girl servants, in the garden, on the beds,
Were picking berries in the bushes
And singing by decree in chorus
(A decree based on that
In secret the seignorial berry
Sly mouths would not eat
And would be busy singing;
Device of rural wit!)

The Song of the Girls

Lovely maidens, pretty maidens,
Darling ones and dear companions,
Romp about unhindered, maidens,
Romp about and have your fling!
Let us start to sing our ditty,
Sing our private little ditty.
Let us lure a lovely laddie,
Lure him to our choral dance.

When we lure that lovely laddie,
When we see him coming closer,
Scatter to the bushes, dearies,
Thence to pelt him with our cherries,
Cherries, yes, and fat raspberries,
Pelt him with red currants too!

"Do not listen to our ditties.
They are not for lovely laddies.
Do not come to spy upon us
When we play our maiden games!"

Maidens, pretty maidens,
Darling ones, companions,
Romp unhindered, maidens,
Have your fling, dear ones!
Start to sing our ditty,
Sing our private ditty,
And allure a fellow
To our choral dance.

When we've lured a fellow,
When afar we see him,
We shall scatter, dear ones,
Pelter him with cherries,
With cherries, with raspberries,
With red currants.

"Do not come eavesdropping
On our private ditties,
Do not come a-spying
On our girlish games!"

40.

Perhaps the girls continue singing—
But Tanya's in a world apart
And cannot hear their voices ringing
Above the beating of her heart.
She tries to still the palpitation;
She tries to stem the inflammation
That turns her cheeks a blazing red . . .
But trying makes it worse instead.
And thus the butterfly will flutter
Its iridescent wings, and flit,
Until the schoolboy captures it;
And thus the winter hare will shudder
When, hiding in the corn, he sees
The rifle peeking from the trees.

They sing; and with neglection
Harking their ringing voice,
Tatiana waited with impatience
For the heart's tremor to subside in her,
For her cheeks to cease flaming;
But in her breasts there's the same quivering,
Nor ceases the glow of her cheeks:
Yet brighter, brighter do they burn.
Thus a poor butterfly both flashes
And beats an iridescent wing,
Captured by a mischievous schoolboy;
Thus in the winter corn a small hare quivers
Upon suddenly seeing from afar
The shotman in the bushes crouch.

41.

Upon her bench she sighed with yearning.
She knew that it was time to rise
And go—but just as she was turning
Onto the path, before her eyes,
There stood Eugene! His eyes were blazing
Like some unearthly creature's, gazing
Into her soul—a look that could
Burn her to cinders where she stood.
The outcome of their confrontation
I promise to recount at length—
But now, dear friends, I lack the strength.
I need some rest and recreation
To put me in the proper mood,
And then I'll tell you what ensued.

But finally she sighed
And from her bench arose;
Started to go; but hardly had she turned
Into the avenue when straight before her,
Eyes blazing, Eugene
Stood, similar to some dread shade,
And as one seared by fire
She stopped.
But the effects of the unlooked-for meeting
Today, dear friends,
I have not the strength to detail;
After this long discourse I need
A little jaunt, a little rest;
Some other time I'll tell the rest.

Susie and the Fossils

by

Nion McEvoy

16 October 2014

Jens and Paulette met in a film class. She was an aspiring actress, and he was an aspiring director, who also hoped to meet aspiring actresses. He had the full beard of an older man, but none of the worldliness, while Paulie too looked older than her years, with a little more worldly wisdom to show for it. He was hoping to discover an angle, a clever line to use to meet her. When he noticed she was reading Syd Fields *Screenplay*, he thought he had it, and he walked over.

"*Screenplay?*" He said. "Isn't that a little bit formulaic?" He'd heard this from an older, more experienced, screenwriter he'd met down at the bookstore café the night before, and so felt confident in deploying it. The writer had sold many un-produced screenplays already, but Jens had only made one film. And he had lost most of that movie, "Bacchus in Excelsis," to a coffee spill and an overactive janitorial service.

"Of course it's garbage," she said, "formulaic and pedantic, right?" He nodded, "But traditional structure? I figure you gotta know it before you can tear it down." She closed her book, which she had been growing tired of reading anyway, and looked up at him. Backlit by the sunset, he had a sort of halo, though a decidedly secular one. The effect was both to shield her eyes from the sun and to give her a chance to look at him, which she liked.

"OK," he said. "If you want to make a feature film—and we all do someday—you got to deliver the audience, and, I agree, the conventional rules will still do that. *Argo*? Academy-award winner for Best Picture? Pure

formula: it opens with a ten-minute, get-'em-into-the-tent scene when the Iranians take over the embassy and a group of Americans escape." She nodded. Encouragingly. "Act One: you can almost hear the curtain drop after 30 minutes, with the CIA guy saying "You got your movie". The Second Act ends with the mission being scrubbed and our can-do hero morosely drinking alone. Then he pulls himself up by his socks and the Third Act goes roars up hill from there to glory. Right by the book. But those aren't my rules."

"What are your rules?" she asked.

"None," he replied. "I let the story take me where it will."

"Sounds exciting. But I don't mind a few guidelines. They save time. And as an actress, I'm always having to follow the rules the director lays down. Sounds like your films might only get shown at film festivals. Good ones though," she teased him, I'm sure."

"OK, OK," he said. "Can I sit down?"

"Sure. And hello. My name's Paulette. Or Paulie."

"Mine's Jens, though I'm not from Norway or anywhere. My parents just liked it and thought it was unusual. Or maybe they were hoping for a Jennifer."

"OK, Jens from nowhere, nice to meet you. I'm pretty new at film, though, so I'm all about learning. I've done a little modeling and some high school theater, but I intend to jump in about 120%.

"Me too, Paulie. At about the same percentage, or more, like 135%! I hope we get to work together."

"OK, but remember: structure, structure, structure! Your job is to make me a star, and we stars need drama. Conflict, struggle resolution. Not art films, like *Empire* with Andy Warhol's camera looking at the Empire State

building for eight hours." "Eight hours and five minutes," he said. "In slow motion." And they both laughed at that.

Fortunately, the perfect assignment came along early in the semester. She could star in it, and he would direct it. The assignment was to make a film on a budget of $200, not including beer or snacks, and they decided to work on it together. Editing time was free. But sets, makeup, costumes and props were included. And talent basically had to work for free. That would be challenging, but what proved most difficult was finding the story.

"Let's improvise it," he said. "Let's not," she said. "Let's find a story and improvise within that structure then," he said. "Right," she said. "Kinda like tango." "Um, yes. I guess. OK. We're on!"

They still had a little time, fortunately, as neither of them had yet come up with anything, and so she agreed to drive up to San Francisco to go to the Opera with her grandmother. Her grandmother wanted to see something called "Susannah," and although she had no interest in it, she loved her grandmother, and so she removed her nose ring and drove over Hwy. 17 and up Hwy. 101 to meet her.

When her grandmother had first mentioned it to her, Paulette said, "Oh, Susannah!" and laughed. But when she arrived at the Opera House and settled into her velvet seat and gazed at the gilt-trimmed ceiling and back down again over the gilt-edged people, what unfolded on the stage was the story of an innocent woman in deep trouble. Deep trouble and very simple sets and costumes. As Paulie began to watch it, she realized with increasing excitement that there was a story there that they could use. And it wasn't the composer's story alone either. He had chosen the setting and made the tale a bit darker and more tragic—it was an opera after all—but Carlisle Floyd had appropriated the basic tale from the *Book of Daniel*, which meant that so could they. The *Bible*, bless its little heart, was several

centuries out of copyright. Floyd's opera was set in Tennessee, and was about a girl who was caught skinny-dipping by a quartet of creepy elders who wanted to have her shunned, and a hypocritical preacher who just wanted to have her.

"What lovely bones," she said to herself, regarding the narrative structure. "And what a cheap set! We can definitely work with that. And maybe throw in some music too!"

When the opera was over she gave her grandmother perhaps the biggest and most enthusiastic hug she had ever given her. "Thank you so much, Ooma," she said. "That was truly awesome!"

"You're welcome, dear. I'm so glad you liked it. I had no idea that it would be such a hit. Next week is "Un Ballo en Maschera. Would you like to…"

"Can't Ooma. Really can't. Really busy. Working on my first film. Gotta go now. Dark road, long drive. Love you!"

"Oh! What's it about?"

"Oh, the film? A girl. It's about a girl. Bye!" As she raced down 101 and slalomed over the steep, winding stretch of 17, she thought about the film potential of *Susannah*: innocence and hypocrisy, puritanism and lust, Santa Cruz for Tennessee; it all began to take shape for her. Her cell phone battery was dead, so she couldn't call Jens. That gave her time to think and dream. The film, the class, the degree, the career—it all seemed like a perfectly aligned pool shot: with one click, everything would roll into its proper pocket. She was thrilled by the opera. High culture really was uplifting after all! Not to mention useful. The full moon shimmered on the waters of Monterey Bay as she drove into town. She tumbled into her bed to sleep. Her first class, "Spelunking for Poets: A Study in Depth," fulfilled a science requirement, but attendance was not absolutely required and she slept straight through it.

Still, there were a few details left to decide. How in fact would they make the film? Was it going to be a tragedy, a comedy, a porno? She would be naked after all for the bathing scene. But pornos were not good for careers. And what was the culture they would set it in? "This is a great idea," said Jens. "I read a sketchy version of the story in a great little Wallace Stevens poem, "Peter Quince at the Clavier," which…"

"Great," she said. "Cool. And look at this! On the cover of the program was a painting by Thomas Hart Benton of Susannah, though I'm not sure we can find a branch for me to sit on… Sounds a bit risky and kind of scratchy anyway. But the thing is: poetry, opera, painting, but no one has done it as a film."

"High five, babe. Great catch. We're on. But let's see. We could do it as a Western, like "Lonesome Dove." Instead of the Ozarks, the Wild West. Susannah is a hooker with a heart of gold and she's taking a sponge bath behind the saloon when…"

"No. Too corny. I do look good in jeans and boots and maybe one of those Marilyn Monroe checkered blouses, but…"

"You would't be wearing them. Back then they wore flouncy skirts and …"

"And I'm not playing a hooker…"

"But it could be a critique of Manifest Destiny and …" "No."

"OK. How about we shoot at the beach. You could be skinny dipping and a bunch of aging surf nazis—you know, grays on trays—find you and hassle you for swimming on their precious surf turf but then get other ideas and…"

"I doubt they'd be too upset to see me. And if they were as stoned as they usually are, they'd probably think I was a mermaid. Besides, it's hard to keep those tide charts straight."

"What about someone like that guy up the coast who bought the giant beach-front land and declared it all his private property and he found you there and…"

"Too weird. And I think he just got smacked upside the head in court. The judge didn't find it credible either."

OK, Paulie. How about we shoot it at one of the little lakes at the college golf course, and a quartet of golfers find you in the very early morning and think they have you to themselves—one of them picks up your clothes, right? While they debate whether to turn you over to to the college for discipline, or get you to, you know, get you to, um, do something for them, the cavalry comes; or, to take a cue from that poem:

'Then with a noise like tambourines

Came her attendant Byzantines.'

"An all-girl band shows up. They could be singing "The Age of Aquarius"—"Let the sun shine in, Let the sun shine in"—or maybe "Got no flowers for your gun/No hippy chick" or something in counter-point to the golfers singing

"Oh, Susannah!

Oh, oh, oh Susannah!

Oh, Susannah!

Oh, oh, oh Susannah."

"Uh huh. We can work on that. But at least we have our location. Let's shoot that scene first. Saturday?" They decided that they would slip into one of the lakes in the college's golf course. They outfitted some friends to look like a group of old golfers—tam o'shanters, grey powder for their beards, a pipe, a cigar and a pair of jodhpurs to serve as golf pants (net

cost $15 for the thrift shop hats)--lined up a group of comely Byzantines and set their alarms for early Saturday morning.

They had decided to start with the nude scene and to build the rest of the film around it. Paulette, who had already posted a few experimental nude selfies (under the alias of @PollyAmour), thought this was practical too. The early morning coastal chill was the first thing that caused her to regret her decision. Next was the slightly icky pond water. Jens, for his part, regretted only having one camera and no second-unit camera man. Establishing shots, cut-aways, close ups, long shots, reaction shots: he would have to do them all and try to edit them into something resembling storytelling later. After all, it was not the most terrible thing of all watching Paulie do the scene repeatedly, even if it provoked increasing irritation. The result of her reluctance and his struggle with getting all the shots he needed was that the clock was ticking, the sun was rising and real golfers would soon appear.

So just as the faux golfers discovered her and the singing Byzantines began to strike their tambourines, the University Provost and his foursome of potential donors found them too. Shortly after that, the campus police descended and arrested them all for trespass, indecent exposure, public nuisance, lewd and lascivious conduct, and anything else that the campus police thought might make the Provost happy again.

II.

It was a bare room with utilitarian lighting and no decor to speak of. Perfect for a trial. Or, well, not exactly a trial, *per se*, but more like an enquiry, they had told him, into why he had been using school property and fellow students to make a porno. The very idea offended Jens. That was

not the way he had a seen it. Rather, he was telling a story the roots of which went back to the the Bible and whose branches had flowered into august modern poetry, modern painting and modern opera, a story of innocence and oppression that couldn't be told without a little skin.

It probably didn't help that the working title, "Susie and the Fossils," made it sound like a documentary about an impudent rock band. Or that Susie herself, or rather Paulie, had thousands of followers for her blog <tumblr.com/PollyAmour>, which consisted almost entirely of casual, but compelling, semi-clad selfies. But wait: maybe they didn't even know that! They did not seem like the most sophisticated inquisitors possible.

Professor Thomas Woods spoke first.

"Jens, I think you know why we're here today. The film you've made, 'Susie and the Fossils,' I believe it's called, has been brought to our attention as a shocking waste of student time and University resources. Furthermore, it may have constituted abuse of the female student involved, whose very explicit image has somehow been taken from your film and been posted on the internet."

"Yes," added Professor Gloria della Falla, "Explain yourself and this… this smut. And why you should not be subjected to severe discipline."

Jens rose, buttoned his jacket, unbuttoned his jacket, ran his fingers through his hair, smoothed it a bit, and began to speak. "Professors Woods and della Falla, "While I have great respect for each of you personally," a sort of white lie as he had never met either Woods or della Falla before and had always avoided their classes, "and for this Panel and for this great institution, which I hope to claim as my alma mater, I also have a loyalty to Art. Art, that is, with a capital "A".

"To all the arts, that is: cinema, poetry, music, painting. That is why I decide to make a film, which, while based on the Bible, alludes to all these arts, while updating key moral themes for a modern audience."

"Jens, that's great," Said Professor Woods, "but could you speed it up a bit?"

"My apologies, sir," replied Jens, "but I must build my defense up brick by brick. It is the way of the experienced trial lawyer and the humble contractor. But, so as not to detain you unduly, sure. I'll do that."

"My first film, "Get Bacch, Loretta," was about a liaison between Bacchus and one of his followers. As a Bacchante wanna be, she wanted to please him. Bacchus was like a god--I mean, he actually was a god--so she had to pull out every trick she had to impress him."

Professor della Falla bristled. "We certainly do not have to hear those described," she said.

"Well, don't worry. The film has been pretty much destroyed. An ex-friend of mine was playing Bacchus. He just lay on the hillside wearing a toga and a wreath, covered with about fifty bucks worth of supermarket grapes. The follower was played by my girlfriend at the time, and I was planning to keep it purely symbolic. Her part was more like a combined audition for the Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders and massage school. Perky and compassionate all at once. Not an easy part, really, but she was pretty good. In fact, it was a bit hard pulling her back, which is why she is now my ex-girlfriend. I had given the following stage direction from Ovid

"There flushed Love has often clasped the horns of reclining
  Bacchus in a seductive embrace…"

which turned out to be a really bad idea.

That's why I sought out a Biblical story this time.

"Of course," said Professor Wood, unconvincingly. "Would you bring in Miss Moore?"

Paulie had spent a great deal of time thinking about what she was going to wear. Her first thought was to wear a short, long-sleeved, skin tight white dress and pumps. Pretty much what Lindsay Lohan had worn for her arraignment for shoplifting. When she told her mother her idea, her mother asked "And how did that work out for Ms. Lohan?" Paulie decided on something plainer then, something that said young, but well-meaning student instead. She was wearing clogs with a neatly pressed denim skirt and had her hair wrapped around a pencil. The nose ring was on her night table.

"Ms. Moore"

"Yes."

"It says on your driver's license that you are 19 years old. Isn't that a bit young for pornography?"

"Well, I think pornography is legal at 19, but I'm actually older than that. I only use that license when I don't want to go to bars. It helps me not get in when I don't really want to go. And we weren't doing a porno. We were doing a serious film about innocence and hypocrisy. In the opera..."

"O.K. But that point here is that you were naked on school property. That violates any number of school rules and makes you and your partner eligible for suspension or even expulsion."

"Noooooooo. I have to graduate!" Every student athlete and every student who lives in a dorm is naked on school property at some point. Why persecute me?"

"Come on, Miss Moore. You were outside in the buff. That does not happen here every day. You, Jens, didn't have permission to film there, and neither of you had permission to even be there on that golf course at that time, let alone in flagrante."

"But rest assured, we are not going to expel you; instead, we are going to suspend you for the rest of the semester."

"But I'll have to take all my classes over again! And not graduate. And extend my student loan!"

Jens looked up from his smart phone and spoke calmly as Paulie wailed. "I'm sorry to hear it. But we'll be fine."

"We will?" she asked him. "Yes," he told her.

Jens rose. "Thank you," he said to the panel. "Can we go now?"

"Of course, you can. Take your time."

"We will, thanks."

When they got outside Paulette, wipig away tears asked. "How can you be so confident, Jens. We totally screwed this up."

“I don’t see it that way. First, I’ve just learned that the University Twittersphere is hopping mad, and has scheduled an an all-nude protest at the school for Founder’s--read “funders”--Day, si they might want to talk to us again before then.

Also, I’ve been posting little micro-films, loops just a few seconds long of your arrest, and of the Provost, smacking his forehead upon seeing you. They’re six seconds long and repeat forever, so you are being handcuffed over and over again all day long, and he is smacking his forehead repeatedly for all eternity. Those, along with my little Twitter blog of our story are already getting interest from hollywood. We need go down there. Can we go today? There are producers and agents who want to talk with us now.”

“You’re joking.

“No. And when one of the producers talked to me, he asked me who the elders were. When I told him, he said ‘Golfers? Really?’

“I thought for a minute and said ‘No, not golfers, the real elders are the members of the university panel.’ He loved it. So when they expelled us (however temporarily), it fit right in with the story! We’ve really got something.”

“Well, alright,” she said and stood up. “*Ad astra per aspera*!”

“Yes! Um, what does that mean?”

“It means that we are going to be stars. Let’s go.”

ABSOLUTION

BY WESLEY MOORE

CHARACTERS:

Reverend Billington: A retired Reverend, sixty-two years old.

Ben: A handsome twenty-six year old drifter.

TIME:

Now

PLACE:

Outside Reverend Billington's clapboard house, on Cape Cod.

(Lights up. Ben stands on a step-ladder, chipping paint off a large clapboard construction, resembling the side of a house. Reverend Billington in shorts, and a pale blue short-sleeve shirt, sits in a lawn chair nearby, with a glass of scotch in his hand. Ben continues to scrape, as the Reverend stares at him.)

Reverend

What you don't seem to realize...is that it's very very hot. (Pause) So hot that I'm not sure this scotch will [redacted] achieve its effect on a day like today ... That's what you don't seem to realize, my boy...Ben? Ben!

(Ben stops scraping, turns, and looks down at the Reverend. The Reverend looks away. Ben returns to chipping the clapboard wall.)

Reverend

I'm not sure this is a good day to work. It is Wednesday and Wednesday is a good work day, but today is so hot... not like the Cape-[redacted]...generally the temperature is mild, that's why I came here, well not-

Ben

I plan to finish this scraping in the next hour.

Reverend

I enjoy your fortitude...you're a fine young man and when you set out towards a task-

Ben

I always finish when I'm supposed to.

Reverend

In my years I have met good men and bad men, diligent and meek. You are...like me.

Ben

What time is it?

Reverend

Oh..let's...

(The Reverend looks at his wrist, his lap, and then around his feet.)

Ben

Did you forget your watch again?

Reverend

Not really.

Ben

I have to know what time it is, Reverend. That's the only way I can work.

Reverend

I'm not sure...I...

Ben

Could you please find out?

Reverend

What does it matter?

Ben

I'm on a schedule.

Reverend

So am I.

Ben

Really?

Reverend

Just a minute.

(The Reverend rises from his lawn chair and starts to walk offstage left.)

Do you think the kitchen clock is closer than the living room? I could go around to the front door...no, I know ...I can just look through the window over here and perhaps see the little clock in the pantry.

(The Reverend peers backstage.)

Yes, I can see the clock now...It seems to me the time is three...thirty and some odd-

Ben
Shit! I knew I was running behind.

Reverend
What's the hurry?

Ben
I told you I would have this job done by today and I-

Reverend
I don't mind. I enjoy your company.

Ben
Well I have to get moving.

Reverend
You are welcome to stay on, even paint the house...

Ben
I told you this was the last chore.

Reverend
Chore? Chore? Well maybe you shouldn't have done anything.

(Pause)

Ben
I have enjoyed working for you and staying in your home.

Reverend
Have you?

Ben
Yes I have.

Reverend
And now it is most certainly time to go?

Ben
I believe so. I'm ready to move on and meet some..other people.

Reverend
Oh.

(Ben turns back to the wall and scrapes.)

Reverend

You know this is a wonderful house. My parish saved for years...on the sly...they well rewarded me with this house...

Ben

Yes.

Reverend

The problem is, I think just one parishoner, Mr. Fitzinger, gave me the house, he was a devout believer...I think he simply gave me one of his summer homes...

Ben

I know.

Reverend

Because I keep finding little objects of his, shaving cream bowl, monogrammed razors-

Ben

I know! So what?

Reverend

What do you mean?

Ben

Why does it matter?

Reverend

It matters...because...I would rather think that the whole congregation placed me here, rather than one man. It makes it seem less personal...a more understandable act.

Ben

I see.

Reverend

They did learn from me though.

Ben

What?

Reverend

Didn't they?

(Pause)

Ben

I don't know.

Reverend
Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer!

Ben
Reverend-

Reverend
I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded!

Ben
Reverend please-

Reverend
What's wrong?

Ben
I would rather you didn't.

Reverend
Didn't what? Don't you think I am rather...heated? (Pause) You too have spirit, but rarely show it.

Ben
Oh really?

Reverend
Yes. But you will only have a chance if someone arranges it, as such.

Ben
Well I'm not religious, but I respect you.

Reverend
Well you are, and I respect you.

Ben
I am not religious!

Reverend
To give subtlety to the simple...to the wise man knowledge and discretion.

(Ben turns to scrape.)

You are an interesting young man.

Ben
Thank you.

Reverend
Why is that?

Ben

Sorry?

[redacted]

Reverend
What are your plans after leaving here?

Ben
Come on, Reverend.

Reverend
No please...

Ben
Well, I thought I'd go down to Falmouth. There's a younger crowd down there.

Reverend
They're too young for you.

Ben
They are not!

Reverend
How old- sixty two?

Ben
What?

Reverend
Oh that's right, you're twenty six...

(Pause. Ben begins to laugh. Reverend then chuckles.)

Reverend
Would you care to join me in some scotch?

Ben

No, I don't like drinking during the day.

Reverend

A useful philosophy.

Ben

You shouldn't drink so much of that stuff. Did you drink when you were a minister?

Reverend

I am a minister!

Ben

I mean...in active service.

Reverend

Who knows...I was diligent to my parish. (Pause) I'm tired of scotch today! It's too blazing hot for such a drink!

(Ben begins to scrape.)

Reverend

Please, Ben, why don't you rest awhile. Come sit and keep me company with my thoughts.

Ben

I really should keep working.

Reverend

~~There's plenty of time to work, don't you think?~~

Ben

~~Well...(Ben sits down on the ladder. He takes a rag from his backpocket and wipes his forehead.)~~

Reverend

~~So you think you'll be finished today?~~

Ben

~~YES REVEREND, I WILL BE FINISHED TODAY!~~

Reverend

~~Generally, the Cape is very mild. That's why everybody comes rushing up here...to jump in the water and~~ relax...You know, I have never been to the water.

Ben

Oh.

Reverend

In your three weeks here, have you ever seen me go towards the water?

Ben

No.

Reverend

I admit I don't go anywhere, but I especially don't go to the sea.

Ben

Why not?

Reverend

Because they would want me to, the parish. They would want me to walk leisurely down to the beach every day and take dips until I drop.

Ben

I doubt it.

Reverend

You don't know people.

Ben

Yes I do.

Reverend

You do not! I am...very aware. I am very aware of what people are. (Looking straight at Ben, he raises his glass.) It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones.

Ben

Excuse me?

Reverend

Why don't you get up there and sweep and sway?

Ben

I just-

Reverend

Now now, get back to work. I'll watch. I enjoy movement.

Ben

Reverend are you feeling-

Reverend

No need to ask such questions! I am...stable. That is my name.

Ben

Maybe I'll just sit here awhile.

Reverend

No you don't. Get up there.

Ben

(Sighs, mounts the ladder.)

Maybe I'll take you for a walk to the beach today.

Reverend

No thank you, Ben. Not yet. Just gather your utensils, and I'll switch my leg in response.

(Reverend crosses his legs.)

Ben

(Scraping)

You know, Reverend, you can tell me anything.

Reverend

Thank you...So you've been a busboy, a waiter, a yardman, and now you're working on my walls.

Ben

That's about it.

Reverend

Do you have good success with women?

Ben

On occasion.

Reverend

You haven't brought any here.

Ben

I didn't want to embarrass you.

Reverend

Women don't embarrass me.

Ben

I meant-

Reverend

I have always held a certain regard for women. They don't embarrass me.

Ben

I'm sure they don't.

Reverend

But I bet they embarrass you.

Ben

They do not.

Reverend

Maybe you'll find a girl in Falmouth...a wife. I never had a wife.

Ben

I'm not looking for-

Reverend

You better find one soon, before they're all used up. (Pause) You better leave real soon before they go away.

Ben

Reverend, please.

Reverend

Are you content with yourself?

Ben

Yes.

Reverend

You are a good man.

Ben

No, I am not a good man!

Reverend

Well...I might miss your...otherness.

Ben

You'll get over it.

~~Reverend~~

~~No.~~

~~Ben~~

~~What?~~

~~Reverend~~

~~(Pause) I'm sorry, excuse me.~~

~~Ben~~

~~That's alright.~~

Reverend

I never had a family.

Ben

I know.

Reverend

Vanity...vexation...

Ben

Well I didn't mind being your son for three weeks.

(Tense silence. The Reverend stares at him.)

Ben

I only meant we got along.

Reverend

Along? (Pause) That was most kind of you, Ben. You know, alot of young people come knocking on my door every summer. They ask me, "Mistah, if I do a little wuhk, I mean I heah you live alone, I mean can I live heayuh?"

Ben

Do you take them in?

Reverend

No.

Ben

You mean I'm the first?

Reverend

Yes you are, and the last.

Ben

Why the last?

Reverend

You are ample. I am retired.

Ben

I know, but I am leaving. (Pause) I am leaving you, Reverend.

Reverend

Are you.

Ben

Yes.

Reverend

This scotch and this insolent sun.

Ben

~~Why did you pick me?~~

Reverend

~~Hm?~~

Ben

~~Why did you let me stay with you?~~

Reverend

~~Oh, I liked your spirit, your freewheeling ways. When you were first standing in my doorway, I saw something in your eyes...an accord...you were like me.~~

Ben

~~Really?~~

Reverend

~~In your eyes. You're stubborn.~~

Ben

~~Yes, I guess I am.~~

Reverend

~~A lot has been building up in me these three years. It's not good for one to sit and drink in a pleasant atmosphere...If I could have just kept going...~~

Ben

~~I know, Reverend. I know you're feeling low.~~

~~Reverend~~

~~Low? Not low...high. I'm way above...I retired for their sake. They didn't need me...~~

~~(The Reverend gets up from his chair, and starts to walk stage right.)~~

~~Reverend~~

~~I'll just walk over here. You get back to work. Yes, I can see it again...(He peers offstage) Yes, it's three thirty and some odd...hmm.~~

(The Reverend turns and stares at Ben, who has begun to scrape again. Ben catches his eye.)

Reverend

~~I have a slightly weak heart, but the rest of me is rock hard, and I don't do anything but sit all day. That's stren~~gth.

(~~The Reverend walks over and sits down in his chair. He fans himself.~~)

Reverend

I ~~could live~~ for another millenium in ~~this old house~~... ~~and we might go to the beach one day, to the ocean~~.

Ben

~~We could go today.~~

Reverend

~~Not yet. It isn't right yet. (Quick outburst of nervous laughter, followed by a resigned sigh.) Oh, I just want to relax.~~

Ben

~~That's all you~~ do.

Reverend

~~Goddamn~~ you!

Ben

~~What?~~

Reverend

~~I'm a man of the Church!~~

Ben

~~I'm sorry.~~

Reverend

~~Are you?~~

Ben

~~Yes, I am.~~

(Pause.)

Reverend

~~No, I~~ am sorry.

(Pause.)

Ben

I'm getting tired actually.

Reverend

You are?

Ben

Yes.

Reverend

Very tired? Tired enough to take a rest, perhaps sit and drink something cool with the reverend?

Ben

Yes, that'd be nice.

(Ben sits down on the ladder.)

Reverend

Perhaps you shouldn't sit just yet.

Ben

No, I'm pretty well finished here. I just have this little spot down in the corner.

Reverend

I could reach that, if I had to.

Ben

Yes you could.

Reverend

But maybe you should work on and on, and never sit.

Ben

No, I'm ready to rest.

Reverend

Are you sure?

Ben

Yes.

Reverend

Well then, at your service.

(The Reverend gets up and offers his chair. Ben smiles, clambers down the ladder, and sits in the chair.)

Reverend

You know, I am going to make us a milkshake today.

Ben

Oh no, reverend, I'll do that.

(Ben attempts to get up, but the Reverend gently pushes him back down.)

Reverend

No, I am going to make it today.

Ben

You don't know how.

Reverend

Yes I do.

Ben

I introduced you to it.

Reverend

I know, and I have watched you from around corners, and now I know. Just sit back, and enjoy yourself.

(The Reverend begins to walk offstage right.)

Ben

Do you want me to tell you the ingredients?

(The Reverend stops, and turns.)

Reverend

No thank you, Ben. Enjoy...revery.

(The Reverend exits.)

(Ben sits back, and sighs. He picks out some paint from under his fingernails.)

(The Reverend returns with two glasses.)

Ben

Back already?

Reverend

Yes yes, I made it last night.

Ben

Last night?

Reverend

While you were asleep, I suppose.

(The Reverend hands him a glass.)

Reverend

And here, the drink of the God, shall we say. It shall be health to thy navel and marrow to thy bones.

(Ben lifts the glass to his lips, but the Reverend pulls his arm back down.)

Reverend

Before we drink, I would like to make a toast. To our wonderful boarder here, Ben Gibbons, for a most disciplined concentration on my walls.

Ben

Thank you, Reverend.

Reverend

Reverend Billington.

Ben

Reverend Billington?

Reverend

Yes we must be formal on such occasions.

Ben

Why?

Reverend

It's just right. Now...drink up.

(They take sips from their glasses.)

Ben

Mmmm very tasty.

Reverend

Thank you.

Ben

Is that strawberry?

Reverend

Yes, fresh strawberries from a garden. I have a friend down the road who always give me strawberries. She doesn't come in to visit, because she is frightened of my past life, but she does give strawberries.

Ben

Delicious...and some vanilla extract?

Reverend

What an astute tongue you have...how you could taste that.

Ben

I know alot about milkshakes. I drank them in high school, before games.

Reverend

What games?

Ben

Football. I was a full back.

Reverend

I could see you as that. Full...back.

Ben

Alot of guys didn't drink them because of their stomachs.

Reverend

But not you. Rock hard stomach.

Ben

That's right. I was doing a hundred sit-ups a day, then.

Reverend

And now you plan to travel and travel.

Ben

Yeah, I'm still young.

Reverend

Indeed. I never felt like travelling.

Ben

No? (Pause) Well I do.

Reverend

Good.

Ben

But honestly Reverend,-

Reverend

Reverend Billington.

Ben

Reverend Billington, you've had quite a...sobering effect on me. I watch myself more...But to tell you the truth...I don't think I'll change.

Reverend

Oh really?

Ben

I like myself too much. (He laughs.)

Reverend

You're a likeable guy.

Ben

That's nice to hear from a man of the Church.

(They have a chuckle, and sip from their glasses.)

Reverend

Basically, you are young and confident and...very free of responsibility. Both of us are.

Ben

Yes.

Reverend

Don't you think we are both rather free spirits?

Ben

Well...yes.

Reverend

Ben?

Ben

What.

Reverend

(Smacks his lips.)

Do you taste something bitter?

Ben

Huh?

Reverend

Do you taste something bitter in the drink? The milkshake?

Ben

(Sips.)

No, I don't think so.

Reverend

Oh...

Ben

Why?

Reverend

Oh nothing. So you are twenty-six and free of responsibility.

Ben

Reverend, please.

Reverend

Reverend Billington. Are you sure you don't taste something...different?

Ben

Why? What do you mean? (Pause.) What am I supposed to taste?

Reverend

Oh nothing.

Ben

Reverend.

Reverend

I put in a little extra something.

Ben

What did you put in?

Reverend

Well, only in one of the drinks.

Ben

What was it?

Reverend

I find the milkshake quite tasty.

Ben

Reverend!

Reverend

Reverend Billington. (Pause) I can't remember which glass I put it in.

Ben

What do you mean?

Reverend

Did you take the glass from my right hand or my left?

Ben

You gave me the one from your, uh, right!

Reverend

Let's see...I walked over to the counter, and I could see...no, I just can't remember.

Ben

What was it?

Reverend

Oh nothing, Ben, only a little something.

Ben

What was it?

Reverend

Well, who knows if I gave it to you, or to me.

Ben

What did you put in there?

Reverend

Oh, I just thought...you and I with all our free time.

Ben

I don't have free time!

Reverend

Yes, yes...

Ben

What have you done to me?

(Pause.)

Reverend

Well, how do you feel?

Ben

I can't believe this! You put something in my drink!

Reverend

Now now, Ben. How do you feel?

Ben

I feel...I don't know...I feel...horrible, you damn old-

Reverend

Shush. You know, I am feeling pretty strong, really.

Ben

Oh, I can't believe this...

(Ben walks over and sits down on the ladder.)

I can not...

Reverend

Poor Ben.

Ben

(His head lowered.)

How you could do this...

Reverend

There there, Ben.

(The Reverend walks across stage and stands over him.)

(Pause.)

Reverend

Beg for mercy.

Ben

What?

Reverend

Beg for mercy, Ben.

(The Reverend places his hand on Ben's shoulder.)

Ben

What do you mean?

Reverend

Beg for mercy!

Ben

Why?

Reverend

Because you heard me!

(He grips Ben's shoulder hard.)

Beg for mercy, Ben. It's our only chance! Beg for mercy!

Ben

Okay, I beg for mercy!

(The Reverend smiles, sighs deeply, and walks over and sits in his lawn chair. There is a long pause. The Reverend begins to chuckle. He chuckles for a long while, Ben looking at him in amazement.)

Reverend

You believed me, didn't you? You believed in me, Ben.

(Long Pause)

Ben

I'm leaving.

Reverend

What?

Ben

I'm leaving you, Reverend.

Reverend

You are.

Ben

Yes. (Pause) I'll finish up.

(Ben stands up on the ladder, and begins scraping.)

Reverend

Are you sure you feel like working?

Ben

Yes.

Reverend

There's plenty for you to do, if you want to stay.

Ben

No.

Reverend

We can go for a swim, if you like. It would be refreshing.

Ben

I don't think so.

Reverend

We could have so much fun.

Ben

Not anymore.

Reverend

Well, whose going to paint the house, if you leave?

(Ben turns back to him.)

Ben

Noone is! Noone's going to paint this house, Reverend.

(Long Pause. Ben turns to the wall,
and starts scraping. The Reverend
stares at him.)

Reverend

I see...I see, Ben...

(Lights slowly fade to black.)

With all due humility

Sam Hamm

requests the honour of your presence
at the regular monthly meeting of

the club

on Monday, September 8, 2014
at

Verbena

2323 Polk Street
San Francisco, California 94109

Cocktails will be served at 6 PM
and dinner at 7,
after which distinguished member

Wesley Moore

will favor us with a selection of scenes
from his upcoming one-man show,
Benedict Cumberbatch Tonight

Kindly RSVP by May 3
to shamm@well.com
or to 415-465-2657

CRANE&C

In Celebration of the Life
of
Lawrence Whiting Jordan, Jr.
1924–2014

Prelude	*Sheep may safely graze*	J.S. Bach
	Jesu, joy of man's desiring	J.S. Bach
	Jerusalem	H.H. Parry
Opening Anthem	*(stand in silence)*	BCP 491
Opening Hymn 397	*Now thank we all our God*	*Nun danket alle Gott*
The Song of Songs (KJV)		Lawrence Whiting Jordan, III
Psalm 121		BCP 473
Log from the Sea of Cortez (John Steinbeck)		Sarah Treanor Jordan
Meditation Music	*Simple Gifts*	Aaron Copland
	Silence	
The Gospel Reading:	Matthew	
The Eulogies		Phil Arnot
		J. Morrow Otis
		Charles Hobson
Notes from Lawrence's grandchildren		Andrew Charles Jordan
The Homily		The Rev. Robert K. Gieselmann
Meditation Music	*Edelweiss*	Richard Rodgers
The Lord's Prayer and Prayers		BCP 496
Concluding Commendation		BCP 499
Hymn 579	*Almighty Father, strong to save*	*Melita*
Postlude		

Please join the family for a reception in next door in Kimball Hall

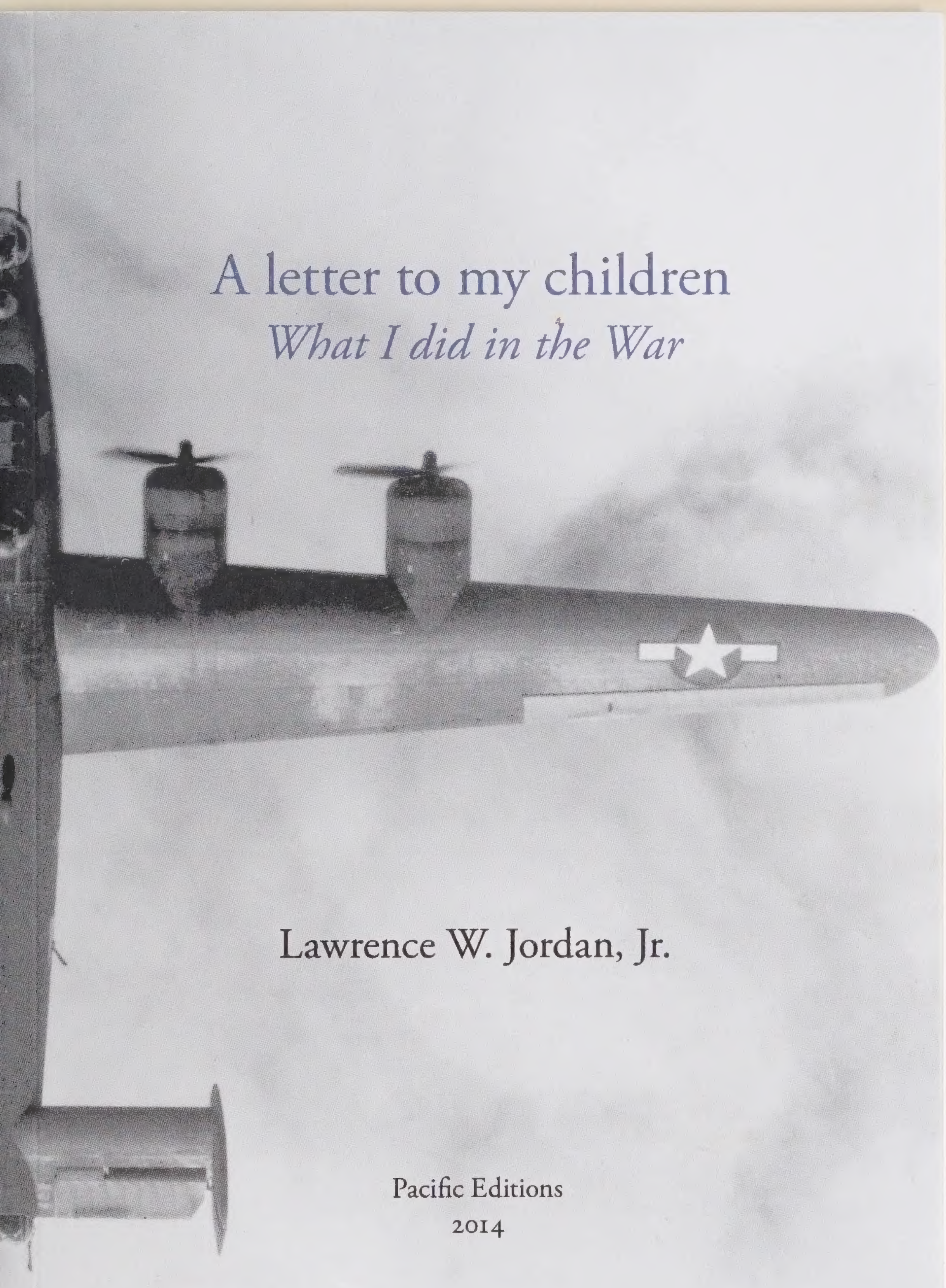
Lawrence Whiting Jordan, Jr.

15 May 2014

Three o'clock in the afternoon

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church
Belvedere, California

The Rev. Robert K. Gieselmann, Officiant
John Karl Hirten, Organist



A letter to my children

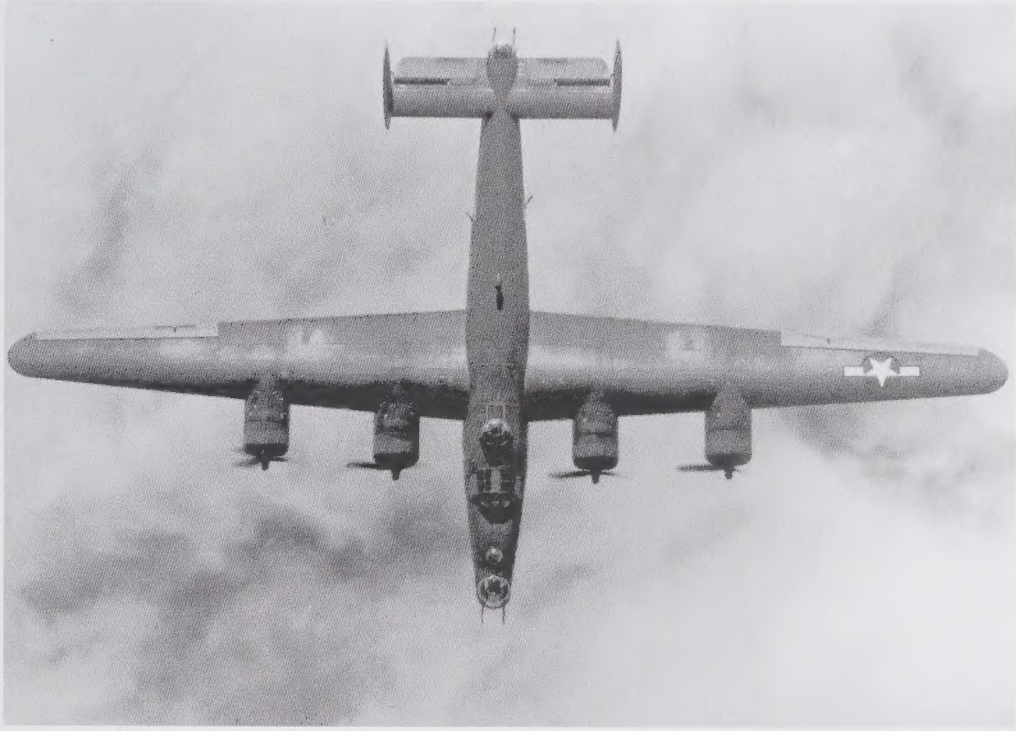
What I did in the War

Lawrence W. Jordan, Jr.

Pacific Editions
2014

A letter to my children

What I did in the War



Lawrence W. Jordan, Jr.

PACIFIC EDITIONS
2014

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Mill Valley, California

For Francie

Foreword

It's 1944 and you are a 19-year-old Second Lieutenant flying over Germany in a drafty, unheated, unpressurized machine carrying 500 pound bombs. As a small distraction to the tension and danger you have been playing classical music over the plane's radio system. Years later you will set the story down describing your experience as the navigator on a B-24 bomber flying missions over Germany out of a base near Foggia, in southern Italy.

The story was presented as a paper for "the club" in 1980 and began as a letter with the words: "My dear children" and concluded 21 typescript pages later with the words "love, Dad." As a reader of the navigator's story you can't help but be touched by the voice of the man who tells it, a voice full of the kindness, intelligence and compassion that marked his life.

Lawrence W. Jordan, Jr, was our friend and colleague and a member of the club, a group of twelve members who gather once a month to hear a member's paper following a comfortable dinner. Larry's paper captures so much of how we knew him that he recently read it again, at our urging. It continues to cast a spell and gives a grand insight into his kindness and his humility.

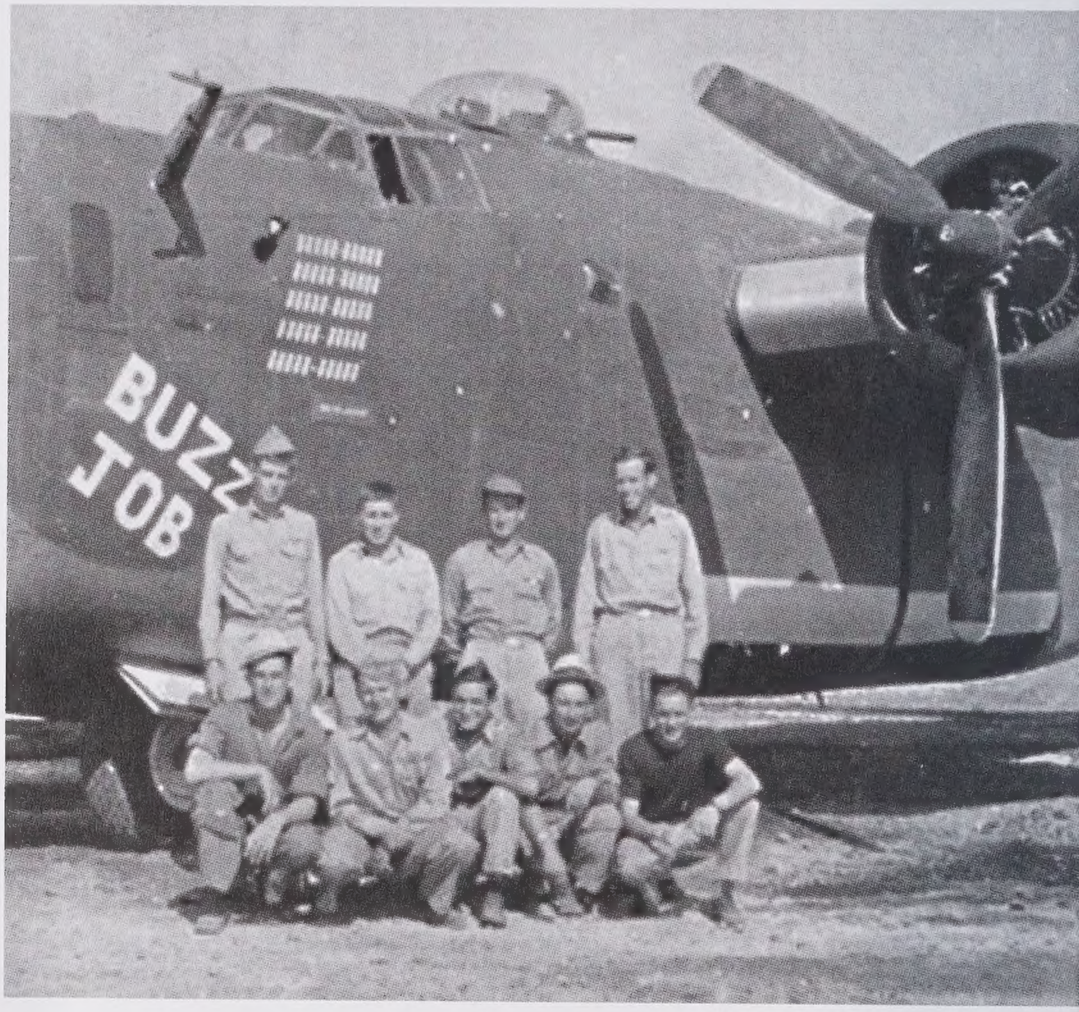
He begins by remarking on his reluctance to talk about himself and the events he experienced in World War II. In his wartime letters home he constantly struggled to spare his parents from worry while still being candid about what was happening. You can see how he tried to make sense of the terrible destruction that he was part of, and also to understand the hatred people on the ground would have toward him as the enemy.

Larry gave his last paper to the club on February 10, 2014. It was entitled "Idylls of Strawberry Valley" and told the tale of two fictional characters, Frank and Anna, who 50 years ago took up residence on the slopes of Mount Shasta. It was clear to all of us that it was the story of Larry and Francie and their longtime engagement with the rugged country they loved so much. I believe he chose fictional characters to avoid talking about himself. Yet all we want to hear is him talking about himself. We will miss him.

Charles Hobson
for the club

A letter to my children

What I did in the War



Flight crew, "Buzz Job," 1944. Larry Jordan, top left.

My dear children:

After a long thoughtful process of weighing fascination in World War II against a natural respect for reticence, I decided you would be interested in a personal view of my contribution to the War. I have been reluctant to detail my affairs as a navigator in the Army Air Force. The rantings of the veteran are repulsive and memories are apt to be more picturesque than accurate. Out weighing these considerations is the hope that you could find some phases of my army life interesting. So here I go.

The silver wings of the airman had tremendous appeal to the youth of 1943. They were the badge of a glorious and heroic life and the elite of the Armed Forces. In the Air Force it was only pilots who sat above the salt. Thus I was heart broken when I failed the eye test for admission to pilot's school but was admitted to the Army Air Force School of Navigation at Hondo, Texas. After 90 days of hard work and a kind assist from the WAC Morse Code instructor on the eve of graduation, I was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant the day before Christmas, 1943, some 3 months after my 19th birthday. I was a very proud officer with new gold bars and new silver wings and eager and ready to pay a dollar bill to the first fellow who saluted me outside the theater where we were graduated. That night I boarded the Sunset Limited for a leave at home before meeting my new crew in Pueblo, Colorado. After a good time strutting about in uniform and silver wings, I left on the "City of San Francisco" for I knew not what, but it was a sad and lonely goodbye to home.

I suppose when I met my fellow officers on my crew I said, "Hello--I'm the navigator". I was the last man to join the crew and the youngest. The pilot, Warren Jensen, was an easy going, warm Swede from Staten Island, borrowed from the Shell Chemical Co. The Co-Pilot, Ed Radke, also relaxed, was the golf pro at a prestigious CLUB at Oconomowoc near Milwaukee. The bombardier, Carl Frederick, was a nervous, high strung, sarcastic pre-med student from Ohio or thereabouts, and was temperamentally unsuited to be on an air crew. As I had six months of college and was "the kid", I was treated with kindness and toleration.

We practiced day and night flying, bombing and gunnery. Then we were transferred to Westover Field in Springfield, Massachusetts, for more training, but it was clear we were close to being sent overseas. In telephone conversations with my father, he would hopefully express the thought that we would be given much more training before being assigned to some combat area. But I knew our stint at Westover Field was about the limit of reasonable training for a bomber crew.

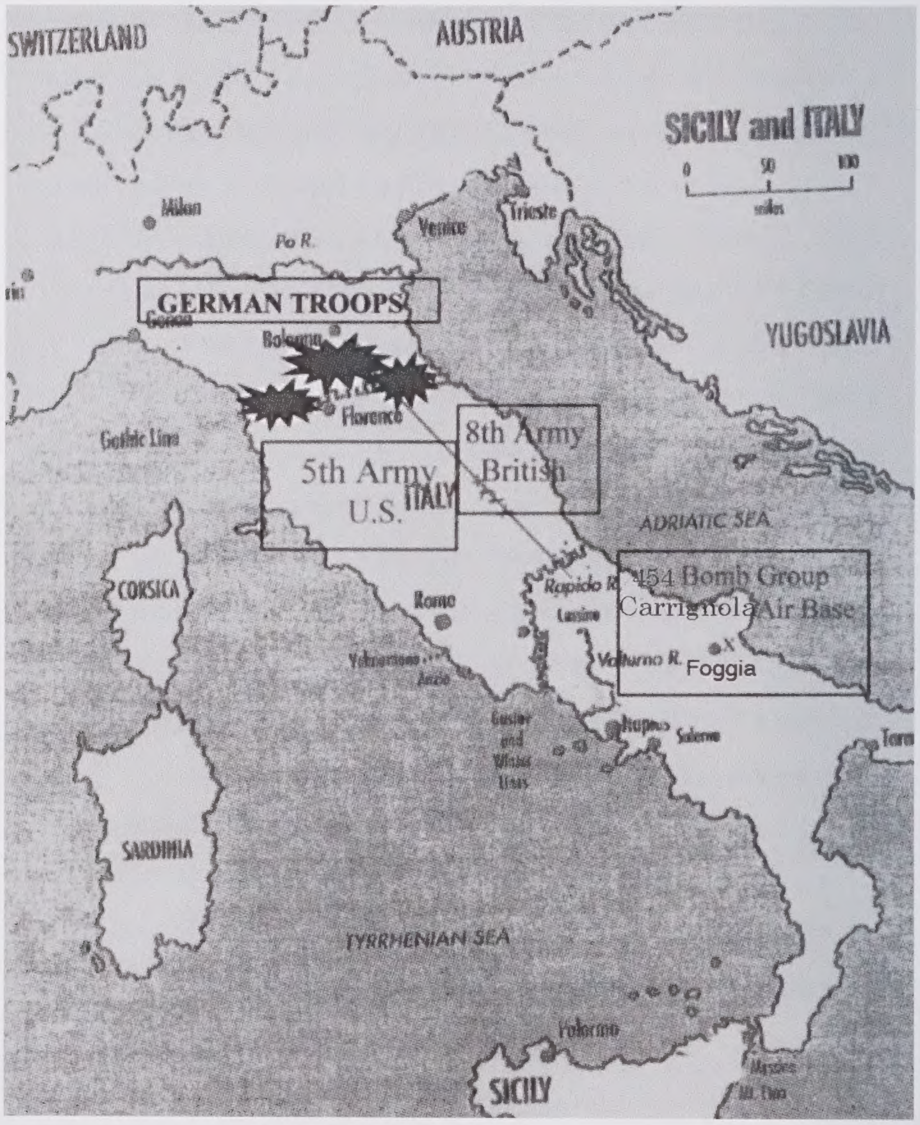
Then the train ride to Long Island and Mitchell Field. We were there given our own airplane -- a brand new B-24 which would take us to wherever we were to be assigned. It was named "Buzz Job", and was as trustworthy and sturdy as any in the Air Force.

"Buzz Job" distinguished itself. It flew 122 missions, the next highest of all the planes in our group. By an odd chance in July 1945 I met the 454th Bomb Group in South America when I was on my way to India in the Air Transport - Ferry Command. The old Group had packed up and was returning home. They reported "Buzz Job" had been shot down over Budapest. It landed behind the Russian lines, was repaired by them, and returned to Italy, and was flying home to be retired.

There were to be some breaking-in flights at Mitchell Field and then, contrary to my father's hopes, we were to fly to our assignment -- Italy and the 15th Air Force. We were then given an overseas post office number and sidearms. Our mail began to be censored.

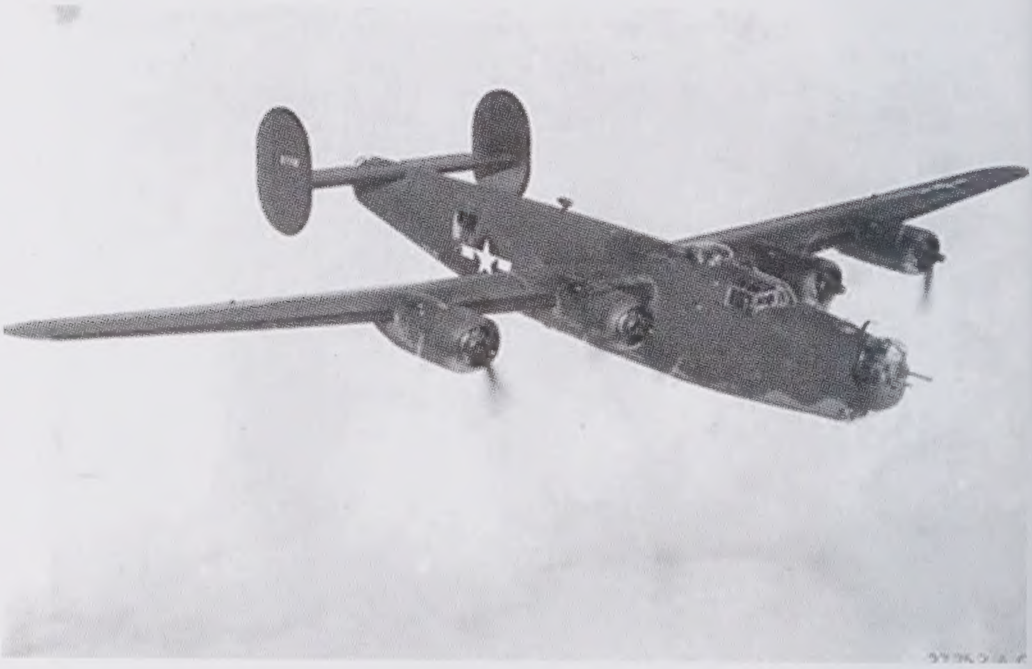
Our last act in New York was to fly down Fifth Avenue below the top of the Empire State Building and thence to war.

Our route was West Palm Beach, Trinidad, across the Equator to Belem and then the long flight across the Atlantic to Dakar, French West Africa. This was a big test for the navigator as the flight was a night one with few aids. We found our destination at Dakar and became "short snorters" -- prestigious fellows who had flown over an ocean. Dollar bills with other members' signatures were our badges of office. Then across African deserts to Marrakech. It was here that I felt the first touch of war. At the air base there were compounds filled with prisoners of war -- wretched fellows for whom we had great contempt and no compassion. Then on to Tunis and finally to Southern Italy where we were given our assignment to the 738th Bomb Squadron, 454th Bomb Group at Cerrignola near Foggia.


SWITZERLAND
AUSTRIA
SICILY and ITALY
0 50 100
miles
Milan
Po R.
Venice
Trieste
GERMAN TROOPS
Genoa
Bologna
Florence
Gothic Line
YUGOSLAVIA
8th Army
British
5th Army
U.S.
ITALY
ADRIATIC SEA
CORSICA
Rome
Rapido R.
Cassino
454 Bomb Group
Carrignola Air Base
Volturno R.
Foggia
Anzio
Naples
Salerno
Gustav and Winter Lines
SARDINIA
TYRRHENIAN SEA
Palermo
SICILY
Messina
Mt. Etna

This would seem to be an appropriate place to describe our airplane. "Buzz Job" was a B-24, known as the "Liberator". The crew was normally 10 men -- the officers were the pilot, who was crew commander, co-pilot, navigator and bombardier. The engineer:, radio operator, and four aerial gunners were enlisted men. On later missions in the summer of 1944 all but the lead and deputy lead aircraft carried a navigator or a bombardier either of which would toggle the switch to release. the bombs at the time the lead bombs were dropped.

The B-24 had 4 engines and 2 tails; the wing span was 110', its length was 67'2" and height 18'. Thus its span was 2'longer than a 727 and its length 66' shorter. It carried normally 10-500 pound bombs, with variation such as five 1000 pound ones or small anti-personnel ones in clusters. The armament was ten 50-caliber machine guns in four turrets, nose, top, tail and belly, two to a turret, with a single gun on each side in the waist behind the bomb bay. The airplane was not pressurized so all crew members wore oxygen masks from 10,000 feet to the normal flight altitude of 19,000-23,000 feet (this altitude varied with each mission.)



The plane was draughty and unheated. The crew wore sheepskin clothing -- coats, pants, boots and helmets or caps to which the oxygen mask and throat microphone attached. Then when anti-aircraft fire was expected, heavy flak suits were added, plus a steel helmet with steel flaps over the earphone. Under the flak suit and over the coat was a Mae West life preserver and parachute harness to which the parachute fastened if needed. Mobility was wanting.

Take-off was scheduled to allow individual planes to assemble into flights, the flights into squadrons and those into the groups. Ours, the 454th Bomb Group, was distinguished by a white diamond on the top half of the tail surface and a white lower half. We flew in box formation. The lead plane was followed by a plane flying below on each side, positioned so that the pilots could see to move close. The fourth plane flew between those two and formed the box. Our crew usually flew No. 3 position on the left of the lead. This was the most difficult position to fly as our pilot would have to watch the lead across the cockpit to keep in close formation. The pilot of No. 2 plane simply looked out his own window on the left side to follow the lead.

While the navigator's station on the B-24 was in the nose behind the bomb sight, in a compartment forward of and below the pilots, early in our tour I adopted as my post the radio operator's table behind the pilots. (The radio operator would be in the waist assigned to one of the machine gunners.) There was less draught, it did not take the effort to reach by crawling through the tunnel and around the retracted noise wheel and was easier, I thought, to evacuate. Of equal importance, there was company -- the bombardier, when he wasn't sighting to the pilots and the release the bombs. I was able to use the pilot's instrument panel, assist the pilots putting on their flak suits, and do other tasks. I also selected music for the crew on the radio, usually classical, from enemy radio stations.

* * * * * *

At our new base in Italy we found the tent which was to be our home was laced up as the crew we were replacing had just been shot down someplace over Southern Europe. I think we were somewhat impressed with the fact that we were now among combat flyers.

After a few days of indoctrination we were blooded. "Today we went on our first combat mission", I wrote home, "I was scared to death but surprisingly enough, not as scared as I thought I would be. When we got back the Red Cross had hot coffee and doughnuts for us. Also, for those that wanted there was whiskey -- two ounces per man. I had one ounce and gave the rest to Ed (our co-pilot).

I hate to make this short but I am very tired so will close."

Thus my contemporaneous and terse comments home after facing a real and angry enemy. I was keeping my family insulated from the realities, a habit I maintained until my 50th mission, when I was "grounded from combat". My attitude seemed one of almost nonchalance I was always scared.

But missions had to be flown. In the evenings we would go by Squadron Headquarters, read the bulletin board to learn which crews were flying the next day. There was a chart posted showing the positions of the planes listed by pilot. The wake-up time was given but nothing else.

At the appointed time next day the crews were aroused and fed. The officers were assembled in the basement of an old stone farmhouse, still standing in 1963 when we returned for a visit. In the front was a rough stage with a sheet over a large map of Southern Europe. The chaplain led prayers and then the sheet was dropped and the target and route were revealed to us. Rough and terrible missions were foretold with groans from the audience. The meteorologist pronounced his guess as to the expected weather on the route; slides of the item to be bombed and other data such as predicted opposition in the form of flak or fighters was shared. Flimsies, so called, as they were supposed to be eaten if we bailed out, were distributed to the pilots and navigators giving times to start engines, taxi, and take off; times to make changes in the flight direction and the initial point -- the point on the map which marked the start of the bomb run. The time of the rendezvous with our fighter escort was detailed for the solace of the bomber crews and the protection of the fighter pilots. Watches were hacked to the exact time. We then checked out our escape kits - packets containing silk maps, compasses, and, if I remember correctly, $500 in American money.

The crews were then driven to their aircraft in trucks with all their gear. At the appointed time engines would start, the chocks removed from the wheels, and with a good luck salute from the ground crew chief, the mission was on.

Gradually the group collected itself in the air -- circling and climbing while all planes caught up with the leader and each plane moved into position. Finally the whole would head away on course.

Tension was always with us and as we got closer to the target it would increase. Had the flak areas been correctly plotted and avoided by our flight plan? Would our escort find us and be on time? The enemy, of course, knew that we were astir and we knew they were warming fighter engines and unlimbering anti-aircraft cannons. Another fair worry for all of us was the mechanical condition of the plane. Did anything portend an early and solitary return to our base? -- a worrisome and frightening event, which happened to us several times. Oil, gas leaks, runaway propellers, or a hundred other causes gave concern. On one trip to the Ploesti oil fields in Rumania which the group never reached, we somehow strayed miles south of course and beyond the edge of the maps I was issued. We were fired on by guns we were not supposed to be near. We were lost. As I was posted on the flight deck behind the pilots I checked the gas gauges which looked like the glass tubes on coffee urns. We were alarmingly low. To save fuel we dropped out of formation as the constant adjustment of the throttles used considerably more gas. We were alone and we knew we were vulnerable. We watched the group slowly leave us behind. The engineer came up from the waist and made the necessary adjustment. Then the #2 engine stopped. The valves were turned and that engine came to life, but then in succession, the other three engines did the same. I plotted a course which I hoped would take us home but how long it would take I could not compute. We then threw out everything that was moveable, the ammunition was last, and we prepared to ditch when we got to the Adriatic. When we reached the sea we called "Mayday" on the radio -- a rescue operation -- and got an immediate course and time to fly to the nearest base -- Brindisi, 120 miles southeast of our base. Slowly, Italy appeared on the horizon, then the base at Brindisi, and after firing a few red flares to announce our plight, we landed safely. At the far end of the runway, #4 engine quit for good. It was estimated we had 10-15 gallons remaining.

When we returned, our tent was

laced up. Young blood was the only defense against these fears.

Some of these malfunctions had small rewards. A long mission to Southern France aborted for us a short distance from our target when we had to feather an engine. I wrote home about the experience and stated that thus "I had to navigate home which was a nice change", meaning I had an opportunity to use my profession. It was on this trip we flew over the tourist attractions of Rome, recently liberated from the Germans, at low altitude on three engines.

On each mission the whole crew was taut. But most welcome was the news, usually from the tail gunner, that the escort had arrived --P-38 or P-51 squadrons flying past (the latter usually tipping their bellies up to dispel any confusion in identification between those single engine fighters and the German Me-109). As they flew faster than we did they would be replaced by a following squadron as we lumbered on. The graceful and protective beauty of these squadrons cannot be imagined or forgotten.

"Today I went up to a fighter group to make arrangements for a dinner with us", I wrote. "It is sort of a good-will party. It is a good thing to humor those boys as there is nothing so beautiful as a group of [escort] fighters flying above you over enemy territory and we have had some wonderful cover lately". I continually praised our escort in my letters and we all felt affection and appreciation for their presence.

The supreme fear was from flak -- the number of 88 millimeter cannons the Germans had in Southern Europe was most impressive -- 200 around Ploesti, 200 in Vienna and about the same in Munich. They were controlled by some form of radar which was accurate enough. "Fighters, while we don't want them, are exciting to watch", I wrote again. "Flak just scares the h___ out of you -- there isn't anything you can do about it." On another mission, as we didn't take the bombardier, I dropped the bombs, crawling to the nose through the tunnel. "It was the first time I have been up in the nose while there was heavy flak bursting around....I think it is a lot easier on the mind not to watch the awful stuff. Heretofore I have read, keeping my eyes very close to the book. We sure did a good job on the target. We could still see smoke 80 miles from the City [Budapest]! It sort of makes me sick and sad to think of the people there. I wish there was some way to prevent it but we just have to do our job".

Enemy fighters gave us all, at least the gunners, a chance to let off steam and aggression. "The group ahead of us were attacked by fighters, after they finished with them (the group ahead), they came after us. Boy, it was sure good to hear our 50 calibers open fire. When I say open fire I really mean it. They started to come in but we beat them off. I watched the tracers from about 12 guns follow them -- I would have turned away too".

So on we went -- someone barking over the radio -- "close it up, tighten the formation, fighters, 3 o'clock high, those are escort." The route never went straight as the enemy was to be kept guessing where we were bound, thus there were turns to be made as we droned on. On approaching the target we could see over heavily fortified ones, the black clouds of flak through which prior groups had flown -- we dreaded our turn. Then at the Initial Point, which started the bomb run, the formation became tight and the flying had to be straight so the bomb pattern would not be spoiled. This run lasted two or three minutes, while flak burst about us. If one looked one could see the guns in groups of four firing at us. Then 25 seconds or so later the bursts blossomed around us. The noise of schrapnel hitting the plane or flak bursting often could be heard over the noise of the engines. The call "bombs away" was a signal for evasive action -- turning sharply or diving a thousand feet or so to throw the German guns off.

If a plane went down we were to count chutes: one, two, etc. It was a happy time when ten were counted. Then the relief of turning home for the long flight back. The total flying time would vary -- 3-1/2, 6, 8, and in one case, 9-1/2 hours. These long trips counted as double credit for our 50 mission goal.

It was a happy moment to hear the wheels touch the runway of our base. When we got out we had a warm welcome from the loyal and valuable ground crew and then we counted holes in the ship -- 3 -- 7 -- and on one trip, 40.

After each mission I took from the bomb rack an arming wire which, in its full length, kept a propeller at each end of the bomb from spinning off, thus exposing the firing pins. I kept one of these, with its warning tag as a souvenir of that mission and wrote the particulars of that raid on the back of the tag.

Donuts and coffee and then interrogation (debriefing as is cant now) of each crew by an intelligence officer. "Flak accurate?; and fighters? what about accuracy of the bombing?; and planes shot down--chutes, etc." Then whiskey and the heavy walk back to the tent.

We were always tired. My letters repeated this theme. "No one has flown for the past four days so we have plenty of rest, no fooling. I don't know when I have had so much rest. Of course, we need it because it all drains out in a few hours of flying."

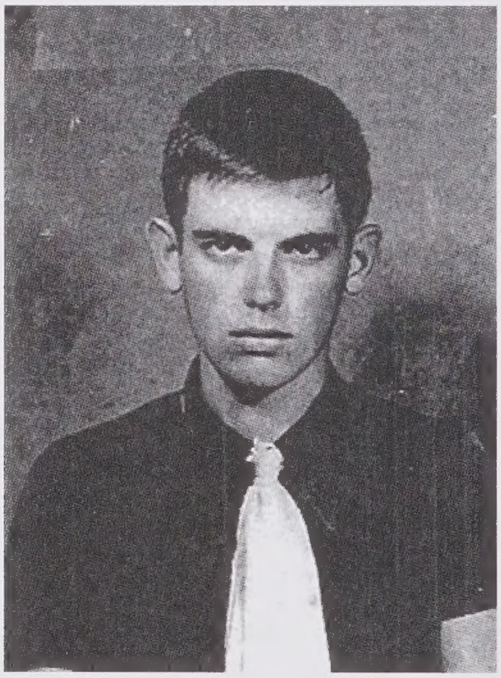
There was dust and boredom. The

requests for writing paper and books -- reading was very much in vogue. On July 14, 1944, after telling the home front I had just been promoted First Lieutenant I wrote, "I just finished 'Ordeal of Hunger' by George Stewart. It is all about the Donner Party. It was very depressing but it was history."

Between missions there were trips to town -- the Officers Club in Cerrignola, USO shows at the Teatro or an afternoon trip to Foggia, a fair sized town, heavily damaged north of us. After about 35 missions we were given a rest on the Isle of Capri -- an idyllic spot maintained by the 15th Air Force as a rest camp. Good food, sheets, waiters in tuxedoes and interesting sights were ours for a week. But the peace and luxury made it harder to go back to war and we speculated whether the halcyon days on Capri had an adverse effect on our attitudes.

Some time in the middle of the

summer our group was advised that the Partisans, who would risk their lives to rescue crews that bailed out and could forge necessary papers, had no facility or supplies to make ID photographs. We were to present ourselves to the Group photo tent and have our pictures taken in mufti -- silk shirt and tie. These photos were to be carried with us to help us escape. How I could pass for a French apprentice was never clear to me. You would probably agree:



I summed up, "I don't have any news (the same old story) as life is dull and uninteresting here (on the ground)." We were, however, impressed with an idea that we were doing an important task in the effort to defeat the Germans. I confidently reassured my family and after only a few missions: "When we aren't flying we don't have anything to do, so again I say it isn't so bad. Of course the missions are sort of rough but not as bad as the papers make out (Was I trying to cheer up the home front?) We went on another one today and really gave them hell. The flack was pretty bad but there was no more target. I really don't see how the Germans can take all they are getting." The target was Bucharest.

How do I now describe my feelings about the long flights and exhausting flying over enemy territory? My notes and letters seem devoid of my feelings except for snatches, a few of which I have quoted in this letter. Perhaps we were discouraged or forbidden to keep diaries for fear of having them fall into the hands of the enemy -- I have a vague remembrance this was so. I was also conscious of adding to the anxiety of my family.

But there lingers the recollection of fear -- fear of not being able to get out of a damaged airplane; fear of having to bail out, given the opportunity to do so. The Luftwaffe had a reputation of honor and would not shoot if we signaled we were abandoning our plane by lowering our wheels, or at parachutes. But ground troops and the populace were thought to have vengeance and hostility, which would be leveled on the hapless grounded aviator. The awkward 45 automatic we carried was to give us no confidence.

There was, to be sure, the fascination to the young warrior to be 4 miles above lands occupied by the Nazis and the wonderment of what was going on below. We would see movements at that height -- barges on the Danube, a boat or two on lakes, a column of smoke from a chimney or on mountain sides, and once not far below us on a high Yugoslavian mountain meadow, a brave fellow waving what might have been an American flag. Some targets I never saw -- Vienna and Ploesti -- as they were veiled by artificial smoke to hide vital targets. The checkerboard landscape of the Balkans was intriguing, the snow caps of the Swiss and Austrian Alps and Carpathian Mountains were gorgeous. It was also of great interest to see from the air such famous spots as Monte Cassino, and the strikingly red tile roofs of Florence (which we were directed to avoid).

But the thoughts of below saddened me as well. It seems now a melancholy business -- far away from home -- exciting in some respects, lonely in others -- but terrible nevertheless. There was, however, the ever present belief that we were facing a real and a competent enemy, a belief authenticated in so many ways, but whose cause was wrong!

In the beginning of August we heard we would take part in a big but secret operation. I started flying with another crew a few practice missions at night -- something new to the Americans. Lack of lights on runways, lack of visible navigational aids, and formation flying without lights were some of the difficulties.

"Aug. 9 up at 0115 to fly another practice night mission" my notes indicated. "We all have an idea what it is for -- only time will tell. But soon." Two days later up at 0430 for another practice mission. Then a daylight mission to France "to blast coastal" with moderate flak but no fighting. Homeward bound we saw many gliders lined up on one of our air bases in Italy, ready. We now knew an invasion of Southern France was imminent.

On the evening of August 14 the bulletin board announced an early briefing the next morning, and then a flood of requests came in from ground personnel to fly with us for the big event -- cooks, intelligence officers -- everyone wanted to watch. I think many were accommodated. "Stars and Stripes", the Army newspaper, reported the pep talk at the pre-invasion briefing of one group. "Take a look at the man on your right and left", said the Colonel, "Take a look and speak up if you see someone you don't know. Because, men, this is the invasion we've been waiting for. Today you people sit at the front row of the greatest show ever seen."

My diary recorded, "Aug. 15 up 0100, went to briefing at 0140. The mission was to France to soften up beach defenses for the invasion. We took off at 0359 just after two ships had exploded." These two planes had crashed just ahead of us taking off. Why I never found out, but gas, bombs, crews and sightseers all exploded at the far end of our runway. We took off over the flames experienced as I was, I could smell and feel fear on the flight deck. There were flares from explosions at distant airfields as well - glowing testimony the United States Air Force was about a new business and one which should have taken more time to practice. "I was really sweating" was my comment. But things got better. "We rendezvoused over Corsica at 0630. Target time was 0725 as the first wave was to come ashore at 0730." The weather was poor. We could see battleships and cruisers offshore shelling the beach, and every imaginable plane from P-38's to C-47's.

MY letter home for that day put it simply and with no possible aid to the enemy. "Dear Family: We flew again today, the mission was one that I shall never forget for many reasons. Unfortunately, I can't tell you any details until later. As you know, France was invaded for the second time. This performance was put on by us and not the 8th Air Force. (This defensive comment was engendered by the belief in the United States that the entire European air force offense was shouldered by the 8th Air Force in England -- an attitude we thought was adopted from a superior public relations effort of the 8th Air Force.)

"I have seen an invasion taking place and it was one of the greatest thrills of my life. I wish I could tell you more but I can't... I hope it was a secret well kept from the Germans. Same old story -- no more news." On this letter someone at home had noted, I'm sure with hope and prayers "-- 48 -- only two more missions."

The sight was truly momentous. Our target was "Beach near St. Raphael" 40 miles southwest of Monaco on the Riviera. We carried 40-100 pound bombs which were to be dropped only if we were on time and if we could see the target. The contrivances of war were across the spectrum, all kinds of naval vessels, in order, off the coast -- bombers, transports, gliders in tow in the air. We saw four bursts of flak from some brave battery. This was a taunt to a nearby P-38 which peeled off and dove after it. But the best laid plans gave us no opportunity to bomb - a light cloud cover hid our target so no bomb drop, and our training, terror and grief came to naught. We returned to our base at 10:00 a.m., after dropping the bombs in the Mediterranean Sea. No one ever landed with the bomb load even though it could be disarmed. Thus was my contribution to the operation known in the history books as "Anvil".

On August 2, 1944, I wrote, "Today is a red letter day -- you will be happy to know that I have been grounded for combat flying. In other words, today I flew my 50th mission...I was the last of the crew to finish. We had a good crew and we were very lucky except for the ball turret gunner and the bombardier, Carl. I didn't tell you about it but the BTG was killed on take-off (with another crew). Carl didn't come back from the last Ploesti mission but we feel sure that he is o.k. somewhere... when I got back to the tent I found our Italian laundryman waiting, 'sweating me out'. Today winds up a period of four months to the day of nervous tension and sweat. I am certainly glad it is over. So much for that."

My reward -- a case of American

beer, four air medals, silver bars of a 1st lieutenant, and a safe 20th birthday in convoy in the Atlantic 5 days out of Naples, homeward bound.

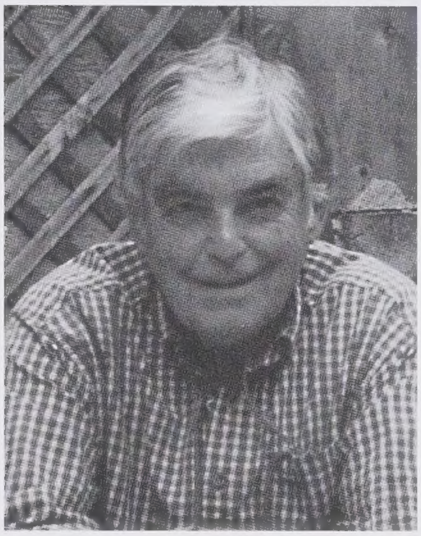
Love,

Dad

April 11, 1980
Lawrence W. Jordan, Jr.

Lawrence W. Jordan, Jr.

September 18, 1924–March 25, 2014



Lawrence W. Jordan, Jr, was born September 18, 1924, in San Francisco. He graduated from Lowell High School, UC Berkeley, and Hastings Law School. In 1949, Lawrence, whom we all knew as Larry, married Frances Grimes and settled in Mill Valley, where they were blessed with four children: Lawrence, Martha, Andrew and Sarah.

He distinguished himself as an attorney in San Francisco, and was a founding partner of the law firm Jordan, Keeler, and Seligman.

During World War II Larry was a navigator in the Army Air Corps, and flew fifty bombing missions over Italy, Germany, North Africa, and Ploesti, Romania, as has been described in this publication.

In 1962, Lawrence and Francie purchased property in Mt. Shasta, California, and spent many years there with their four children, seven grandchildren, and numerous friends and visitors.

Larry was a longtime member of the Pacific Union Club, a Chair of the Commonwealth Club Book Awards, a trustee of Henry Ohloff House, and a member of the Board of Directors of Grace Cathedral. He was a contributing book reviewer for the San Francisco Chronicle and was admitted to the Most Venerable Order of St. John of Jerusalem by Her Majesty the Queen of England.

He was a man of many talents. He published and wrote the introduction to *Notes on My Journeying in California's Northern Mountains* by John Muir. He was a master woodworker. Many of his woodcarvings are incorporated into the family cabins at Mt. Shasta. Larry was an avid reader and a collector of fine books. He had a penchant for quoting from all of the works of Shakespeare, and would on occasion break out in verses from Gilbert and Sullivan. His yearly reading from *A Christmas Carol* was a highlight of the family's holiday gathering. An adventurous cook, he was known for baking the largest and lightest popovers. He will be remembered for his humor, intelligence, generosity, selflessness, and many words of wisdom.

He died in Mill Valley on March 25, 2014.

For twenty-five years Larry (far left) was a member of the "club," our eccentric writer's group. Photo from 2012.

Members of the club
April 2014

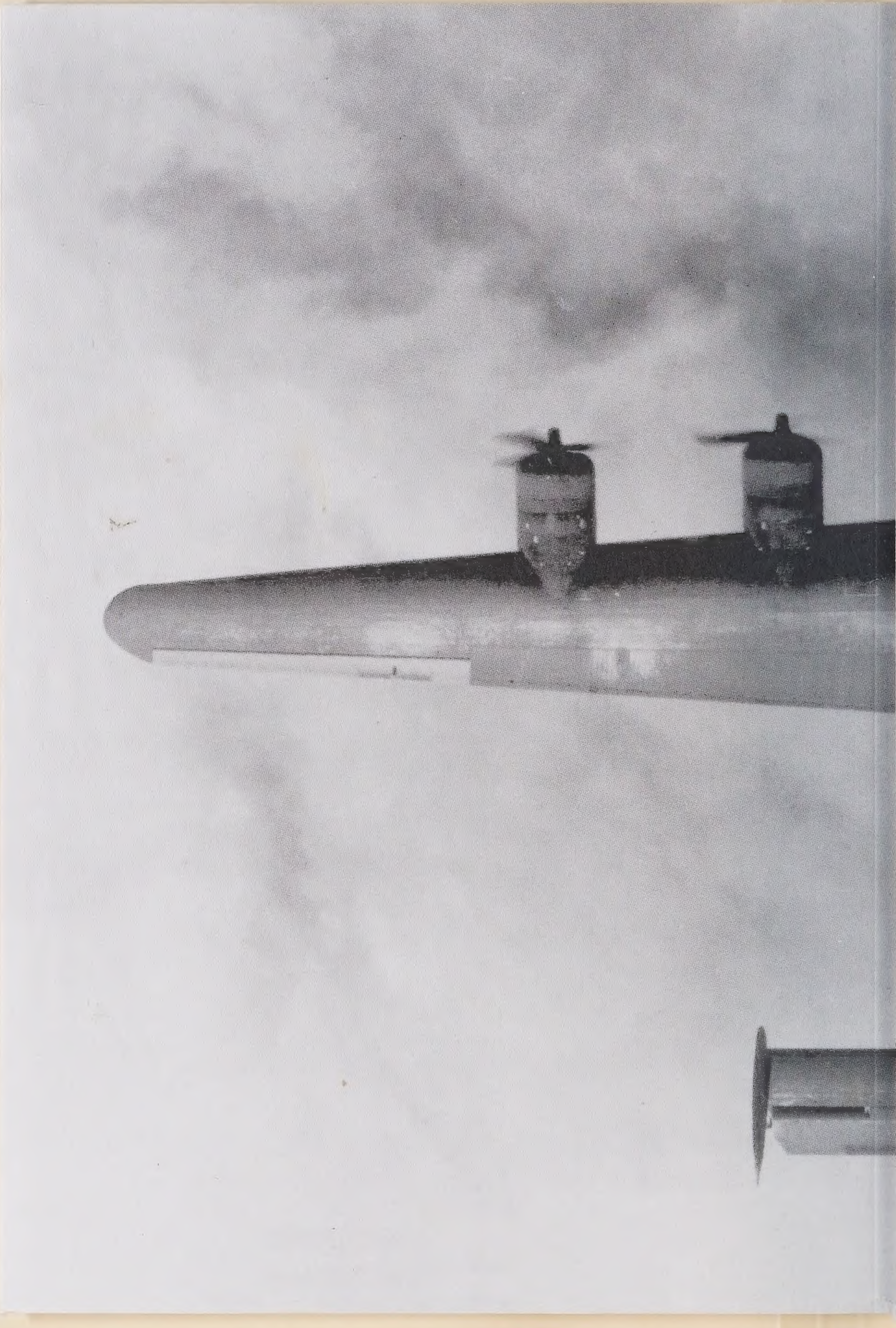
James L. Bennington
Philip E. Bowles
Sam Ham
Charles M. Hobson
Lawrence W. Jordan, Jr
Brewster Kahle
Nion. T. McEvoy
Wesley Moore
David Pettus
Bruce Sams
James E. Sherman
Barrett H. Weber

COLOPHON

Three hundred copies of *A Letter to My Children: What I Did in the War* were printed at Autumn Press, Berkeley, California, in the spring of 2014. The book was designed by Charles Hobson and Yvonne Tsang and the text was set in Courier Standard Medium and the titles and introduction were set in Adobe Garamond.

We want to express our gratitude to the members of the family of Larry Jordan who have provided photos and details and encouragement for this publication which has been financed by the members of the club. Special thanks to Sam Hamm for editorial assistance and to Nion McEvoy for having Chronicle Books provide an optical character scan of the original paper.

A note about coincidence: Larry Jordan recalls breaking the boredom between flights in 1944 by reading George Stewart's *Ordeal by Hunger*, about the Donner Party. When he joined the club in 1976 George Stewart was a member, having joined in 1954.



the club

will hold its next meeting at the

Caprice Restaurant

April 14, 2013

~ ◆ ~

Congeniality Hour

6:00 P.M.

Dinner

7:00 P.M.

~ ◆ ~

Paper by

David Pettus

The Caprice Restaurant is located at 2000 Paradise Drive
Tiburon, CA 94920 • Tel: (415) 435-3400

RSVP to host Bennington • E-mail: jlbenn@pacbell.net, or
Tel: (415) 435-7706 If no answer, please leave a message

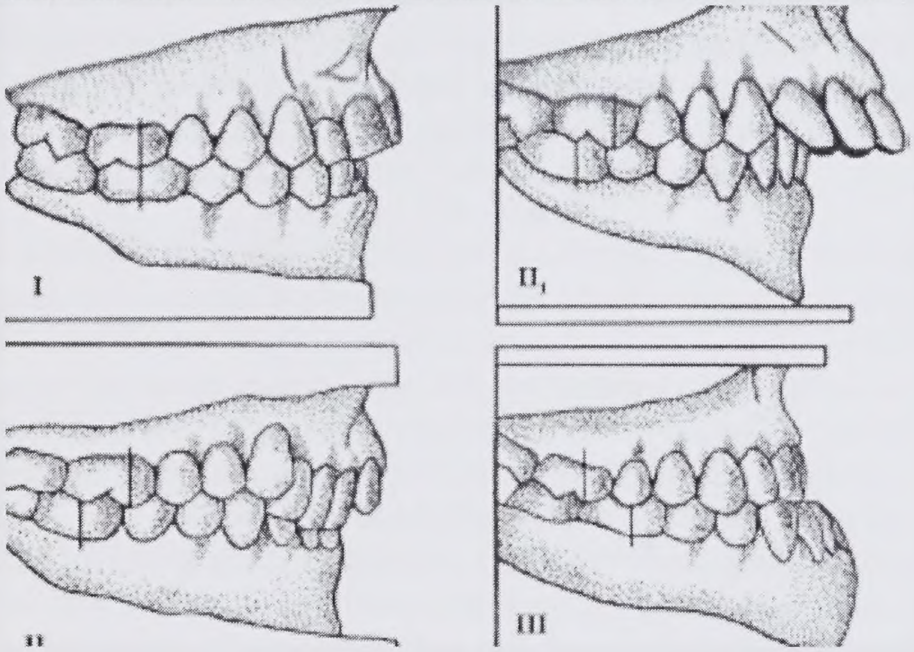
CRANE & CO.

Maloclusion

the club

Philip Bowles

June 8, 2014



Johnny Minus lit another Chesterfield. He was beginning to get nervous. Frank the Hat was never, ever late. Even at his age, the man was like a machine, "mind like a steel trap" people would say; full of energy, meticulous, punctual. Johnny kept looking for Frank's white Rivera, wondering, and worrying. They were going to meet with Leaky Forbes, who was not exactly Johnny's favorite guy. He didn't really dislike him, he just didn't like being around him. Mostly because he always had a faint smell of pee about him all the time. Just a whiff, like being down the hall from the urinal in grammar school. It seemed to exude from him, in his sweat, his clothes, the old-fogey hat he wore, like Frank's. Now he wore those special pants, but as a kid it must have been disgusting. Of necessity, Leaky had become a solitary guy, a tinkerer and part-time inventor. They knew him from his electronics store, where he would recondition the 8 track tape players and car radios that Johnny and Frank brought him. The negroes in New Haven would steal them from the college kids, and Frank would fence them, or have Leaky install them in the cars of customers searching for a good buy. Leaky had taught the negroes how to defeat the car alarms. They were clean-cut, eschewing many of their fellows' street look of absurdly large hairdos, long fur coats and big hats. Ignoring the popular National Geographic names like Uhuru and Shabazz, the business names these guys used were the Presidents: Roosevelt, Lincoln, Jefferson. The men were industrious, honest, and surprisingly mild mannered. Johnny liked them.

✪

A week earlier, just across the border in Connecticut, Walter Frankel, DDS was at work, making an initial assessment of his 11 o'clock patient, Gary Seligman. He had smiled when he saw the kid walk in, a nasty Class II, type 2 malocclusion, good for four grand at least. In the chair, Walter noticed a few caries as well, an easy seventy-five bucks apiece. In his most professional and friendly manner, he explained to mother and child the nature and duration of the work he intended to do, showing the X-rays and plaster molds from other patients. The child sat mute, and picked at his incipient acne. In another couple of years it would doubtless be worse. However, the mother was a twentieth century fox. It must have been the father with the ugly genes. She wore a ring, not that that mattered much these days, and stood delightfully close to him while examining the X-rays. For the ten thousandth time he muttered a silent prayer of Thanksgiving for the Women's Libbers getting rid of bras. When the child left to use the toilet, Walter suggested to the mother that she might want to have a private consultation to discuss some of the appliance options, such as headgear, that youngsters often hated even though they saved time and money. Walter always kept Tuesday afternoons open for emergency patients (who were billed double), some office work, and the occasional consultation. "Next Tuesday is fine", she said, looking at him rather boldly. He checked his moustache in the mirror. He hoped it was starting to look like Harry Reems'.

"Doctor, you have a phone call" the receptionist said. "Your father." His father had taken to calling him out of the blue, with nothing particular on his mind. These chats usually lasted about three minutes, since they had little to say to one another. Since Walter's mother had died, the old guy was getting lonely, and probably bored.

Walter sighed. Dad, "Frank the Hat", as he wanted to be called, as though he were some big time crook or gambler. True, Frank Frankel was kind of a crappy name, and a guy ought to be able to be called what he wants to be called. Frank was not exactly pathetic, and he certainly bent the law most of his life, but such crimes as he committed were so diminutive and unimportant even the police could not be bothered with him. But he had tried to be a good father, he and Mom scrimping and saving to send him to medical school. The first professional in the family, My Son the Doctor. There was no need to ask him if he had ever *wanted* to be a doctor, it was simply assumed on him. So, maybe he was not Chief of Surgery at Beth-Israel, but Walter had managed to cheat his way through dental school in Guadalajara, and Mom had lived long enough to see her son's MD plates and professional certificate on the wall.

Dental school had been surprisingly profitable for him, since it was simple to refill about half of the lidocaine vials with saline solution, and to procure fake Darvon capsules to replace (again, in a careful, limited way) the ones he stole. As a serious young medical student he had no trouble at border crossings. He sold his contraband to reliable drug dealers, or traded these drugs for pot which he would resell profitably at his old college campus. Nobody at the dental school ever wised up. The Mexican patients were well known to be chronic whiners, and what did they expect anyway, painless dentistry from first year students?

* * *

Tuesday's consultation started out to be very promising. Mary-Agnes Seligman was quite cooperative. Walter made second base standing up, although he was disappointed to discover that Dow Chemical had been there first. He was waiting for the sign to steal third when the receptionist buzzed him on the intercom.

"I'm sorry to disturb you Doctor, but your father is here, and he is insistent he see you right away." Shit.

Frank stood in the waiting room, all smiles. Something must be up. "Walter listen, I need to put my Rolex in your safe." He had acquired the gold Rolex, a Presidential model, back in the days when he ran a pawn shop, and practically worshipped the thing. Was the pawn shop before or after the car lot, or the liquor store? Walter sometimes could not remember. "Johnny and I are going to Mey-hee-co! One of those Perillo tours, eight days of fun in the sun in Acapulco. Private motor coach to see the Mayan ruins. Fly right there on a jet plane. Maybe we meet some ladies, who knows? Don't let that shock you, it has been five years since your mother left us, you know. Snow on the roof but a fire in the furnace!"

"Dad, they're all jet planes now." Walter did not have the heart to tell him there were no Mayan ruins anywhere near Acapulco. The private motor coach was some crappy Mexican bus that they would have to take every day because the cheap hotel was so far from the beach. But what the hell, let the old man have his fun.

"But I can't take the watch with me, they'd kill me for it, don't you think? Let me store it in your safe."

Walter did have an office safe, where he kept the prescription drugs and other valuables, such as the gold and silver for restoration work. In preparation for his divorce from Sylvia a few years ago, he had purchased a considerable quantity of gold, probably enough to make crowns for an entire Royal Family, in order to hide assets from her. Since then, he had also been buying silver steadily for the same reason. On his books, one set of which Sylvia's accountant scrutinized regularly, it was classified as janitorial expense. Now that fat hillbilly Bunker Hunt had run the price of silver up to unimaginable levels, and Walter debated whether to try to sell any of his metal horde. But it would have to be done without Sylvia, or the IRS finding out, which quandary he had not yet settled. He opened the safe for Frank, put the watch away, and turned around to see Maryann, as she had told him to call her, standing very close to him again. Frank winked at him, leaving.

But it seems Walter had not just been tagged out between second and third, but ejected from the game for leaving the playing field. Maryann was all business now, her eyes oddly ferrety, yet professional, composed.

"Thank you very much for your advice, Doctor. I'm afraid I have to be going now, but this meeting was quite informative. My husband and I will discuss the financial and treatment options you presented, and get back to you right away." Just like that, cool as water.

Walter continued to wonder about the mysteries of women, and consoled himself for the rest of the afternoon by catching up on his financials. One of the best parts of dentistry was the business part. Nobody had the cash to pay up front, so they paid in installments, month by month, at delightfully lucrative interest rates. Walter had bought the practice from the broken down old fraud to whom he still sent monthly checks. He imagined him roasting by a pool somewhere, while the grandchildren waited for him to grow a melanoma. The state did not seem to mind that he practiced both orthodontics and general dentistry. Walter knew he was equally incompetent at both. Orthodontics was the cash cow, and any dope could drill out a cavity and stuff some amalgam into the hole. He liked to use laughing gas so the kids would not complain of any pain. Walter figured that by the time he hit fifty he might do the same thing as his predecessor, retire, live on the installments and what he had accumulated. Maybe take up sailing or something.

✪

Johnny Minus glanced at his watch one more time, and looked up to see Frank, all smiles, tapping on the car window. The Riviera was nowhere to be seen. Frank had taken a taxi. "Sorry, to be late, Johnny-O, damn car wouldn't start." Frank loved that car, but it was a piece of shit. He eased in on the passenger side, and bummed a Chesterfield. "I've developed a way to pay for our little Mexican vacation, and then some." Frank outlined his plan, with all the timing and details planned beautifully, they way he always did things.

"Your *son*? You want to steal from your *son*? If I were Jewish, I would call you a goniff." Johnny was actually shocked.

"Listen, he has insurance, it won't cost him a dime. It's just another deal. The gold in there, it has to be worth fifty grand, maybe more. Probably some silver, too. We take it to Mexico, turn it into dollars in a Bermuda bank account, we're done."

"And the way you are going to get this stuff into Mexico is..."

"Golf clubs. I have a friend, a Chinaman, he can do anything, fill the shafts of our golf clubs with the stuff. We take our golf clubs with us on the trip."

"We're not burglars, for Christ's sake! How do we crack the safe, get past the alarm?"

"I saw the safe combination last week, when I had him store my Rolex. As to the alarm, that's where Leaky comes in. He *installed* the damn thing."

Leaky had begun a fledgling alarm company, and claimed to have some very devious methods to foil burglars. Frank had introduced him to Walter, ever the cheapskate, who was happy to install one of Leaky's systems for half the money the big alarm companies charged. As long as the insurance company did not care, neither did he.

"So we have to cut him in, fine. Why am I in this at all, anyway? What do I do?"

"Johnny, you do nothing but drive, keep a lookout, the bookkeeping and the banking arrangements, as always."

"But you can drive yourself, and know how to do the books as well as I do after all these years. It's a simple laundry job in the Caymans or Bahamas."

Johnny had done time, two years, for tax evasion once. But he never stole from clients, or swindled, or worked scams. Small businesses, restaurants, bars, contractors, all needed tax preparation and advice. Because he had lost his license, his rates were low. If some of his clients asked him about things like how to evade taxes or hide assets, well, it was up to them as to whether to take his *purely hypothetical, you understand*, suggestions. Or not.

"Johnny. We are partners, partner, and have been for a long time. You have brought me some business, and I have brought you some, and fairness demands that we continue as partners."

Johnny actually began to mist up a little at this. Frank, a friend. They had done business for years, but it had always been strictly business. He had never been a guest in Frank's house, never knew when his birthday was. The Mexican cruise idea was just a way for Frank to avoid the single supplement. As with the radio-thieving Presidents, Johnny had never really expected more than a formal relationship with Frank. He thought about this as he drove them over to the old Sunoco station that now housed Forbes Laboratories, Leaky's grandiose name for his radio shop. A bored-looking Puerto Rican of indeterminate age stood behind the counter in the "showroom", with a wall of 8-track radios and gaudy speaker surrounds. There was a panel with buttons so customers could listen to the various setups, which all sounded the same. In the back, in the "laboratory" as the sign on the door put it, the smell of 3 in 1 oil, mixed with pee and the funk of the pipe that Leaky was always smoking made Johnny a little sick. The place was a dingy warren of wires, old car radios, multiple televisions and odd looking electrical test devices. A grey cat jumped in his lap and brushed her tail in his face. Like all cats, she must have known he was allergic.

Frank tried explaining the job. It was hard talking to Leaky, because he would never stay on one subject, and always wanted to talk about his alarm system. "Frank, you say you want to do this Friday night and do you know how these new capacitors work? And penis envy, for Chrissake. The papers say that theory is a bunch of crap. Of course it is. Did you ever want some female organ growing out of *you*? Fellas, I need to expand my alarm business and what about your watch, Frank? You gonna steal your own watch?"

Frank had thought this through, like everything, and said he would just appear to buy another one a few months later. As usual, Leaky settled down after ten minutes or so, and began to talk seriously. "Fellas, this could ruin my business." "Roon", he said, which annoyed Johnny. Leaky pronounced words like "roon" and "becoss" and "dwog". Johnny remembered his father speaking that way, and had always made efforts to be more elevated himself.

"Leaky, your alarm "business" consists of exactly one installation, and that is at Walter's office."

"But the concept is brilliant, completely innovative, it just needs a chance. It is the only system out there that absolutely, positively, can not be defeated. If word gets out that a Paramount alarm was compromised, my business is gone, kaput. And help yourself to a Danish."

Leaky helped himself to the contents of a torn Entemann's box which looks as though it had been opened a week ago. But he began wheedling now, as Johnny knew he would. He saw that Frank would have to increase Leaky's share of the take. They settled at fifty percent. After all, they could not do the job without his cooperation. Yet all he had to do was sit in his office and flip a switch between 2AM

and 2:30 on Saturday morning, while Frank and Johnny had to take the risks. These things never worked out fairly, he brooded.

✪

Gary Seligman went into the bathroom to masturbate at 5 o'clock, as usual, before he started on his homework. His mother and Danielle were busy downstairs discussing some business matters, and they never wanted him around when they were "in conference" as they called it. "Danny" as Danielle wanted to be called, had taken up body building, and the magazines she left in the bathroom provided him some assistance. They were not great; the men all looked like fairies, and most of the women were kind of tough, but they wore skimpy clothes that revealed their figures.

Downstairs, Mary-Agnes poured herself a couple of fingers of bourbon, and brought Danny a beer. Without her wig, Mary-Agnes felt cool and comfortable, and snuggled up to Danny on the couch.

"The dentist. He's better than I thought."

"So fast? You are making good progress, girl." Danny lit a Kool, and took off her shoes.

"Listen, he has a safe, a big one. I can't imagine what he keeps in there, but his father put a gold Rolex Presidential in there today, and that alone is worth the effort."

"Counter-measures?"

"The safe is a Mosler ninety four thousand series. You can open that antique in your sleep, honey. He has an alarm, but it's some just crappy local company called Paramount. The usual window bugs, primitive stuff. Probably does not even call a central station, just rings a bell."

"Sounds like a go, girl. Let's do Friday night." Stubbing out her Kool, Danny was a take-charge, decisive person, she liked to tell herself. "Incidentally, what did he say about Gary's teeth? We really ought to do something for the kid, he's starting to look too much like your husband."

"Yeah, you're right. We can pay the fucker with his own money", Mary-Agnes chuckled. "And I think I know how we can get a discount." She had spotted Walter a few weeks ago at the local Steak and Brew, and could tell he was the simplest kind of idiot man, who could be led anywhere by his God-given handle. She would scope out his house later. The guy could have more. But first, they had to plan Friday night. Danny leaned over and gave her a peck on the cheek as Mary-Agnes got up to get a pad of paper.

✪

Friday night, and this time Frank was punctual, as usual. Johnny drove Frank's Riviera, because Frank had asked him to. He supposed it made Frank feel

more important, which didn't bother Johnny. But it was nearly 2AM, and he was sleepy. They had stopped at Dunkin Donuts for some coffee, which did nothing to keep him awake, but made him want to pee. Johnny drove towards Route 9, knowing he would reach it about 200 yards from the strip mall where Walter's office was. Traffic was light, and he knew they could park behind the building where the Dumpsters were, out of sight. Nice and quiet. Leaky had given him a small radio he could use to signal Frank if there were any problems outside. As he turned the corner, he saw four patrol cars, two State and two local, lights on and flashing, parked in front of Walter's office. Lights everywhere, it looked like a murder scene. Holy shit. "Keep going, keep going, keep going", Frank hissed, and Johnny did. The coffee gave him indigestion, and kept him from sleeping properly that night.

The next day, they both sat in Frank's living room, waiting for the evening news to come on. Johnny raised his third Seven and Seven to the big 24-inch Zenith, and complimented Frank on his taste in electronics. Just like Frank, he thought, everything first-class. The lead news story, of course, was about the "gal-pal cat burglars" and their capture. That idiot Sargent Provenzano, Frank cold not even guess how much he had paid him over the years, rattled on about the string of local burglaries that might be traced to the pair. A Rolex watch reported stolen in 1968 was found in their possession, and a number of other valuables were found at their residence, undoubtedly linked to other crimes. Walter, looking nervous, thanked the police for their assistance, but tried, nervously, to downplay the value of the attempted robbery. Laurence L. Forbes, President of Forbes Laboratories, however, was far less reticent. How he had managed to insinuate himself into the evening news they could only wonder. Somewhere he had found an ill fitting tweed jacket, and a bow tie, and puffed at his pipe while the reporter asked him about his alarm, which had worked, when so many others had been defeated recently. "Professor" Forbes they even called him. "Our customers are high net worth individuals with a variety of security needs. Becoss there are those in society who would try to roon all we have built up, it is incumbent on those of us with property to protect what we have. The police should treat them like the dwogs they are. I am proud to be the owner of a local business, not part of a corporate chain more interested in profits than protection. We have a network of confidential clients all up and down the Eastern Seaboard, and look forward to serving the needs of our community for years to come."

They would leave for Mexico on Monday. Maybe something would turn up. Frank the Hat had said there would be ladies. Johnny told himself he ought to get a haircut.

ESCAPE

Philip E. Bowles
the club
8 June 2014

ESCAPE

PART ONE:

Past the outskirts of town, to the cobble banks, scrambling now, Anna ran along the dry wash, its sandy bottom choked with salt cedars, the snaky claws of it tearing at her ankles, her clothes and portmanteau peppered all over with the awns and bristles of the grasses there. She did not need to run, she told herself, she knew when the train was coming and where it would be. The train would be there if she were not, and if she got there sooner, it would not make the train come any time other than the time the engineer, or the railroad, made it come. The familiar grinding noises came and went, sometimes louder, sometimes not. Her thighs pumped her up the other bank, and she gained the better road there. Dusting herself off, she began to walk in an easier style, not wanting to bring attention, yet still determined, leaning into every step as though to force the road to go downhill before her.

Snow was coming. It was dark early morning; Orion in the southern sky, hunter, messenger of the time of long nights and short cold days. The darkness was comforting around her, its familiar sunrise noises of the birds and the funk of sage still hanging from a light rain that had fallen earlier. In her right eye, something flashed; but then, it often had. The exertion had not tired her; Anna was a strong woman, nearly six feet of her, not broad but square shouldered like a man. She had packed her things nearly at random, but she felt she had enough; the bag would not tire her.

PART TWO

When Keith Gudgel drove his truck into Elk Bend, he did not expect to be leaving the next day with a woman and two children packed in with the sewing machines in back. He was passing through, exploring some sales territory in a newly minted county, asking for directions and trying to follow the none-too-reliable maps that had begun to spring up with the automobile. The country was prospering and settling now, the gold-shanty and whorehouse camps being replaced by real towns as the Eastern capitalists invested in gargantuan new mines and smelters. Not gold and silver, but copper, iron, nickel; foundations of the great unsleeping dynamos that powered the tools and the stampers and the lights of the factories a thousand miles from here. Families, at least some, lived here now, and men with educations and capabilities beyond just endurance or dumb luck. They had built neat small houses, schools, churches, and wanted a place to settle and raise children.

Keith had always liked demonstrating his machines, showing the housewives their speed and capability, how they would pay for themselves in no time from the savings over store bought clothing. Then he might sell one or two in some small town, on easy but surprisingly lucrative

credit, and with those terms, the machines would pay him back many times over. If he had to repossess a few, they could be reconditioned and sold again, perhaps at a discount if a customer were nice. And Keith was not a man to ignore a kindness, a gentle, even sometimes pleading, gesture from a customer. It was a side benefit of the business, harmless or even generous on his part, he reckoned. He was a gentle man, he told himself, not just a gentleman, and never asked to take what was not offered. Nor did he ever boast of anything. It was bad for business, and disrespectful.

Perhaps it was because he was neat and diminutive, almost effeminate, keeping clean and pomaded, in clothes of the latest style from the cities. His fingernails glistened over soft and youthful hands, the hands of a doctor or musician. Although he was not vain, he would sometimes look at the back of his hand, to admire his nails. He saw them as the faces of eight Domican nuns, smiling from under the wimples of his finger tips, reminding him of home. Keith's appearance just did not seem tough enough to raise suspicions from any man; just an inoffensive little dandy going about his business they way a child's balloon might bounce aimlessly down the street and vanish, forgotten by those who had glanced at it. It would always astonish him when the terms of sale shifted. Not an hour after presenting his card and sample machine at Anna's door, there she was beneath him bucking and whistling *hiï-hiï-hiï,* as some slow and graceful marsh bird does when you startle it at night. Every woman has her noises and her smells. This willowy beautiful Amazon, he thought, she was no bad girl. There are so many sad and lonely women. Would they still be that way when they were old? Were there old ones now? Why do these men neglect them so? He didn't want the whores and saloon girls, and in fact he did not want these housewives either, as they belonged to others. Invariably afterwards, the women would be just cold and businesslike, in truth hurtful to him when he would reappear each month to collect the next installment. But he would want one *like* these, clean and stable women who wanted families, and if he had one he would not neglect her so that she had need of men like him.

And then again he was with her later that night at the place she said to meet, engulfing him completely in a way no unpaid woman ever had, and those without desire or delight the way she had. That was when she said that they must run away together. Besotted, extinguished, he had let himself consider it. It did not help his senses that she had brought a pint of whisky, something he did not ordinarily use except as commercial courtesy demanded.

Her husband, she said, was a beast, and a danger. He wanted her in carnal ways so loathsome she could not bear to tell him a description. He drank, and cursed the children. When he hit her, the Sheriff and the deputies would do nothing. He and the Sheriff would cavort together in the sporting houses with the mine executives. Anna felt it would be a matter of time

before he contracted some vile disease and infected her with it. Blinded, mad even; how could she be a mother to the children then?

They left an hour before sunrise, the children still confused and sleepy. Anna wrapped them in blankets and kept them dark, so that they did not waken until mid morning. Rachel, the infant girl, cried, and Anna comforted her with nursing. The older one, the boy Tommy, looked about five. He yawned, and gaped about, questioning, but not alarmed, because his mother and little sister were with him. He looked at Keith, and smiled shyly.

"Mama, where are we? What are we doing?"

"Hush, Tommy, your Father's old friend Keith is looking after us for a spell. Father was called away."

"Called away? He said he was going to Bozeman." Tommy remembered a trip to Bozeman, where there had been a fair with a Western show.

"Well, he was in Bozeman, and...and a telegram came, saying he must go right away to, to...Panama. There was a terrible mine collapse in Panama, and Papa was needed urgently to oversee the repairs. Panama was ever so far away, and it might be some time before he got back. He called on the telephone last night, and said to be a good boy and to look after your mother and sister."

"But why are *we* going away?"

"The Company owns our house, Tommy, and if your father is working somewhere else, they can hardly expect to house us, can they? You wouldn't want to go to Panama, would you? It has wild beasts and all sorts of tropical fevers. They have sent Keith to help us find another place to live."

"Will Papa get sick?"

"No, I'm sure he will be fine. Maybe he'll shoot a tiger, and bring the skin home for you. And look, you have Roger-Bear, and Rachel has her little bunny, all snuggled up with her."

For a while longer she continued counter-volleys to this line of questioning, and rather adroitly, thought Keith. There was something calming and matter of fact about her that he liked. She knew how to handle a situation. He listened, and he thought. This was madness! He had always considered himself a practical, prudent man. A planner. Yet here he was, acting on a whim, and possibly already being pursued by the police. Abetting a desertion, even from a brute, could still be a crime. White Slavery, Adultery, Abduction...these were serious crimes, or could be. Depending on the sensibilities of the local law enforcement, he could be in serious trouble, or be ignored. But perhaps he had been too prudent up to now, he told himself. Perhaps that is why he had never found a woman to care about, because he was too cautious, too unable to reach out and take instead of waiting to receive. Fortune favored the bold, the takers in this world, he told

himself, and he would learn to be one. But his head hurt from the whisky, and he was beginning to become afraid.

In any event, they needed to get as far from Elk Bend as quickly as they could, and he needed time to think. They had plenty of money, because Keith was a careful businessman, and at least that would help. The truck was unremarkable, with no identifying signs. They spent that night in a quiet farm town, with a respectable hotel, and nobody paid them any attention. In the morning, Anna went out to buy a few necessities, while Keith and the children stayed in the hotel. Anna returned in a state of considerable agitation.

"The man in the dry goods store is a terrible lecher. He stared at me as though he were undressing me right there! Something must be done!"

"We're just about to move on. Let the people of this town deal with whatever the fellow is. It's none of our concern."

"But you must", she said. "You must at least confront him, for the sake of my honor. He needs to know that decent folk will not patronize his store, and that he can not treat a woman like that. He probably only does this to women from other parts. No respectable town would tolerate such a cad. You simply must let him know."

Keith sighed, and stood up. "Well, if you insist, I will have a word with the fellow. Teach him a lesson. But then we must go." What sort of "lesson" that might be, Keith wondered. He had never struck a man in anger, and doubted that it would have much effect if he ever did so.

The elderly storekeeper stared at him through bent and filthy spectacles which appeared to have little effect on his obvious myopia. His expression was one of perpetual perplexity, as he stood close to Keith not only to see him, but to hear him better, as he appeared to be rather deaf as well. An owl, perhaps, but no one's wolf. After exchanging a few pleasantries, Keith returned to the hotel room.

"You might suppose I let him know where he stood." Keith told Anna. The lie, a goldfish, fluttering in his belly.

They made Denver that night, anonymous now amid the bustle of the larger place. Even if a poster existed here or there, the police had more to worry about in a big and rough-edged city than an out-of-state adultery case. Keith arranged to sell the negotiable notes for the sewing machines he had sold on installment to a man named Ratliff, and practically gave away the four machines he had in inventory to an Italian. These were unfavorable but adequate terms. He felt hurried, and was not in a position to dawdle; although he knew, given time, that he ought to have been able to realize a fair sum on the book of business he had assembled, the list of customers and their regular needs for replacement parts and minor repairs. Still, from what he had in savings,

plus the proceeds of the day, the four of them would have no financial concerns for quite some time, while he reestablished himself.

That took less time than he could have imagined. In negotiating the sale of his truck for the purchase of a more appropriate and comfortable sedan, he so impressed the manager of the Ford agency that he was offered a sales job there on the spot. "By God, I've been looking for a man like you." MacDonald, the owner, said. "One with bargaining skills, good clean looks, and a ready mind. You damn near had me giving you the saloon car and paying you for that beat-up truck at the same time! Never in my life." "Never in my life", Keith was to learn, was one of the fellow's pet expressions, along with "There you have it" and "Goes to show".

But he was not a bad employer, and Keith took to the work readily, even if he missed the travel, not to say the side benefits, of his old position. As the months went by, he felt little need for any side benefits, as Anna's ardor and creative energies in that regard showed no inclination towards decline. He began to wonder, hope even, that they might conceive a child, a possibility he never mentioned. But she was careful with her calendar, and with some foul smelling concoction that she used to wash herself.

They had found a house, a rental in a respectable neighborhood, and lived openly as man and wife. Tommy was enrolled in the grammar school as Keith's stepson, Rachel was starting to walk. Rachel was beginning to lose the clinging, nearly parasitic instincts of the infant, and was beginning to interact with those around her. Anna had explained to a skeptical Tommy that it "made more sense" to act as though Keith were his stepfather.

Keith and Tommy had begun to enjoy each other by this time, so perhaps it was not such a stretch, Keith told himself. Once Tommy had asked him to carve a little wooden boat, which he had done obligingly, and painted it, as well. Tommy suggested they go down to a nearby creek and launch it. When it started to get too far downstream, Keith took off after it. "No," Tommy said, "Let it go. It will paddle to the sea. Papa used to make wooden boats with me, and we would let them go that way. He said some day he would take me to the seashore, where the water is salty. But he never *painted* the boats."

Strange behavior for a drunken beast, Keith thought. But then, children always try to see the best in us. He remembered how he had loved his own father, whom few others had found any reason to love.

Keith told himself that they had achieved a level of domestic tranquility most men would envy. And they would, but for Anna's occasional eccentricities. She would insist that a bear had been after their garbage, or that the old Union veteran across the street had dreams of arson. He had limped by to offer his new neighbors a hospitable gift of some honey combs from his back yard bee hive. In return, he told Keith, he was repaid with a blast of farrago about his trying to

burn their house down. Keith reassured the man that Anna must have been been play-acting with the children, but the old codger was having none of it. "Mad as a dog, that one. Seen 'em before, in the War." From that time on, he would cross the street when he saw them.

Other times, she might stare listlessly by the window nearly all day long, her household chores and motherly responsibilities nearly forgotten. These were passing things, though. Keith knew women were moody, and had never really spent any time living in the company of one. He knew that their monthly times could make them unstable. Mostly she was lively, laughing, eager to see him when he came home, playful and loving with the children. He had built a little nest for them, he thought, snug as a swallow's. Yet he told himself, instead of being bound with mud and insect thick saliva, their nest was knit together with a web of lies. Sooner or later, the children would reach an age where the story made no sense to them, sooner or later someone would ask about a marriage license, sooner or later someone would ask about their father, or the father himself...where was he? Their escape had not been so neat and quick that an investigator would have to be some tireless Javert to track them down. Was the man really such an uncaring beast that he did not even care to see his children again?

Business at the Ford agency had been good, and Keith knew that selling one thing was very much like selling another. Sewing machines had the advantage of the stabilizing income from the notes he took back; but automobiles were more expensive, and the commissions were larger. He could open his own agency, or buy into Mac Donald's over time, he told himself. But none of that could happen with his domestic arrangements in such an unstable state.

Privately, he consulted a lawyer to investigate the possibilities of Anna's suing for divorce. He was not sure she would marry him, but there was no point in asking her, if divorce was impossible. The lawyer said that it would probably take him a week or so to check on where the father was, and how he was living. If he had taken up with another woman, or was living the degenerate life that Anna had described, it would not be complicated. It would be a simple matter to hire a process server in Elk Bend, one whose investigative methods were not constrained by anything but his own conscience.

The week the lawyer called him had been a good one. Keith had sold two new automobiles and had a prospect for a third. "He's dead. Hanged himself right in their kitchen the next day. Couldn't take the humiliation, they say. She'd run off with a fellow once before, but came back. The say the husband was a quiet little fellow, an engineer. People say she ran the roost in that house, and he would just follow her around like a puppy. But them's the breaks. You're free and clear to make her an honest woman, son."

Keith was not sure if he felt free, or clear, or how he ought to feel. He did not know how to broach the subject with Anna, or what they might tell the children. Instead of going home

triumphant with his sales success, he walked in barely able to look at any of them. Perhaps tomorrow, he told himself. He and Tommy read a book together for an hour before bedtime. Anna had not been sleeping well, and would often wake very early to go out walking. He wanted badly to be in bed with her tonight. Snow was coming, he thought, as he crawled in with her.

PART THREE

As Anna approached the tracks, the sun was just nosing over the eastern horizon, the right edge of the orange dome just touching the edge of one of the rails, their east-west lines the only thing not irregular out there. Nothing in nature is straight, she thought. Even the telegraph lines made soft catenary curves between the stars. Calmly, she seated herself on a flat rock bench, waiting, looking west, into the darkness, sapphire. She was so close to the tracks she could look almost straight down them, to the place where they appeared to meet. The grinding in her head was steady now, not stopping even for a second. Grinding, and lights in her right eye. There, she thought, there was a gleam from the headlight on the locomotive, or a reflection off its windshield. She heard its whistle.

The thing announced itself upon her, an explosion of vibrations. Huge, bellowing, ringing, enormous, it raced towards her, bathed in the sunrise yet black with coal smoke and filth from the prairies. She stood, the engineer could never see her with the sun in his eyes, could never stop if he had tried to, and Anna moved toward the tracks, transfixed. Its wet coal-flavored breath and wind whipped past her, so close she could have touched it with her hand. Then there were the clattering cars, and the caboose, and then nothing, nothing but vibrations, and silence, except for the ringing in her ears, and the grinding, but softer now.

She looked down and noticed that she had wet herself. She dried herself off as best she could with the clean undergarments from her bag. Roger-Bear and the little pink bunny looked at her from among the clothes. The bear had lost one eye. She remembered comforting Tommy when that had happened. A hundred yards away there was the highway, where she flagged down a westbound truck. She would take it into an unknown country.